The Sounds of Supernatural
Soliciting in *Macbeth*

by David L. Kranz

IT is a commonplace among critics of *Macbeth* to point out that the eponymous hero's first words echo a similarly antithetical line chanted by the witches in the opening scene of the play. Macbeth's "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.38) is noteworthy not only because it reiterates a paradoxical statement, but because it refers back to the very beginning of the play rather than to the sorceries which have just preceded Macbeth's arrival in the third scene.[1] Macbeth cannot have overheard the "fair is foul" antithesis of the witches; instead, it seems to come to his mind out of the very thick air. Whether readers and audiences infer that Macbeth and the witches speak the same language by mere chance or that the latter's words have infiltrated the hero's mind simply by proximity, a close and mysterious connection between the hero and the supernatural hags is established well before the actual staged temptation of the former. Thus it is by means of verbal echo, not dramatic confrontation, that Shakespeare first connects Macbeth to the Weird Sisters.[2]

What is repeated in Macbeth's iteration is obviously morphemic and semantic, a matter of individual words and their juxtaposed contrary meanings. But the repeated words "foul and fair" are part of a line that has distinct rhetorical and rhythmic properties as well. Fricative alliteration reinforces the repetition, and the completely monosyllabic nature of the line crisply highlights its iambic meter. Poetic patterns, not simply repeated words, play a part in suggesting to an audience the

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[1] Quotations from *Macbeth* follow the Arden edition, Second Series, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Methuen, 1984). Quotations from other Shakespearean plays are also taken from Arden editions.

[2] George Walton Williams, " 'Time for such a word': Verbal Echoing in *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Survey* 47 (1994): 153–59, is the most recent of many to make this point.

mysterious source for Macbeth's subjective commentary on the day's battle or its weather.

Later in the third scene, Shakespeare calls explicit attention to the poetic continuities that exist between the supernatural and human characters. Fifty lines after Macbeth's words on the day's vicissitudes, after the witches hail Macbeth and Banquo three times and give them three predictions, and after the witches vanish, the two soldiers reiterate the gist of the surprising prophecies:

> *Macb.:* Your children shall be kings.
> *Ban.:*   You shall be King.
> *Macb.:* And Thane of Cawdor too; went it not so?
> *Ban.:* To th' selfsame tune, and words. Who's here?
>   (1.3.86–88)

This brief stichomythia is followed immediately by the arrival of Rosse and Angus, who announce that Macbeth actually has been named Thane of Cawdor. The audience, of course, has known of Macbeth's advancement since the end of 1.2, where in words and rhyme reminiscent of the witches' opener, Duncan orders in one breath the "death" of Cawdor and the removal of his title to "Macbeth," after which Rosse responds, "I'll see it done," and the king redundantly notes in closing, "What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won" (1.2.66–69). At the end of 1.3, this repeated announcement sends Macbeth into rapt asides so intriguing that little, if any, attention has been focused on the words of Banquo and Macbeth I have quoted.

The lines, however, clearly imply an intimate relationship between the witches' words and the hero's words. Banquo's answer to Macbeth's query about the accuracy of his remembrance of the witches' prophecies, moreover, refers not only to the repeated "words" themselves but to the "tune" with which Macbeth has accompanied them. Banquo says that Macbeth's rendition is "selfsame," although on the page neither word nor rhythm is perfectly identical to the earlier predictions. The order, for example, is exactly reversed, and all the hailings are gone. Perhaps, then, Banquo is only joking. It is more likely, however, that Macbeth has imitated the speech of the witches. That he has done so, or rather that Banquo and Macbeth have together done so, is hinted in the repetitive rhetorical structure of the lines: three separate phrases, the second of which repeats the first with nearly identical syntax and the same end-word, "King."

Metrically, the Scots' remembrance does not recapitulate exactly the

largely iambic (with some trochaic) feminine pentameters characteristic of the witches' prophetic greetings to Macbeth, nor the largely trochaic (with some iambic and ambiguous, possibly spondaic) tetrameters characteristic of the prophecies about Banquo, nor the flexible seven-syllable verse heard in the chiasmic repetition of final hails to both Scots. But in the soldiers' later colloquy, the strong iambic regularity of the three three-foot phrases preceding full-stop caesuras and the two mirrored (trochee-iamb) two-foot phrases at the ends of the first two lines adumbrate the major meters of the sisters' speeches and emphasize the repeated two- and three-foot phrases distinctive in them. Thus, as Macbeth's first words call attention to a strange linguistic similarity, so do the lines that close the hero's initial confrontation with the Weird Sisters. In these lines, however, Shakespeare has Banquo comment on the form and style of Macbeth's reiteration, and since we already know what Macbeth says is true, only how he says it matters here.

What follows is an analysis of poetic repetition, verbal sameness (but not exactitude) in *Macbeth*. Beginning with a look at the witches' tune and then showing several ways that weird music shows up (and sometimes does not appear) in the speech of other characters throughout the tragedy, I shall attempt to expose the thick clusters of repeated sounds that help express whatever it is the witches represent and serve. While purely dictional echoes of the language of the witches in the mouths of the two main characters and general patterns of linguistic repetition throughout the tragedy have long been noted, this analysis will delineate for the first time a variety of repetitive formulae, their common shape, at what points in the play they are strong or weak, and how they operate in characters, like the Porter, whose surname is not Macbeth.[3] The mapping suggests that the influence of the witches extends itself substantially to the inner thoughts of key figures at Inverness and also, but much less so, to the public pronouncements of more

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[3] Williams notes the repetition of Macbeth's "fair and foul," the king and queen's "hereafter," and Banquo's "fear and fair," suggesting that these dictional echoes show how the characters succumb unconsciously to the witches' evil ("Verbal Echoing," 153–59). His limited focus on so few repeated words spread over several acts, however, raises questions about audience recognition of the patterns. Repeated diction, moreover, can be found in any play and does little to highlight the distinctive quality of *Macbeth*. Finding only evil in the play's many echoes also seems unnecessarily limiting. By contrast, Madeleine Doran's "The *Macbeth* Music," *Shakespeare Studies* 16 (1983): 153–73, sees the play as a musical composition involving a number of "patterns of recurrence," including theme, voice, diction, alliteration, assonance, paronomasia, rhyme, and isocolon. However, except to see this "music" as a vague circulation of moral ambiguity, Doran does little to analyze the style in detail.

overtly orthodox Christian characters. The witches' tune and words are heard, however slightly, in almost every scene, and are even perceptible in the speeches of the anti-tyrannical Scots toward the end of the play. This range and distribution suggests that the poetic patterns represent powers that include but go beyond the demonic. Finally, I will explore the contextual complexity of the poetic phenomena and suggest how the distinctive style of *Macbeth*, more fully understood, might help mediate between conflicting interpretations of the tragedy in the last century.

I

If Macbeth can imitate the Weird Sisters both unconsciously and consciously in 1.3, so can the play's audience, for it has heard the witches' tune in at least two (if not all) of the first three scenes. In fact, an audience has only to witness the always significant and proleptic Shakespearean first scene and experience the sisters' "sickening see-saw" speech to have their repetitive poetry indelibly imprinted on its collective mind:[4]

> *1 Witch:* When shall we three meet again?
> In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
> *2 Witch:* When the hurlyburly's done,
> When the battle's lost and won.
> *3 Witch:* That will be ere the set of sun.
> *1 Witch:* Where the place?
> *2 Witch:*   Upon the heath.
> *3 Witch:* There to meet with Macbeth.
> *1 Witch:* I come, Graymalkin!
> *2 Witch:* Paddock calls.
> *3 Witch:* Anon!
> *All:* Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
> Hover through the fog and filthy air.
>   (1.1.1–12)

Most critical discussion of this dialogue has been concerned with the paradoxical semantic quality of the witches' language and the obvious rhetorical dualities that support such polarities.[5] The "fair is foul"

[4] Quoted phrase from L. C. Knights, as quoted in Frank Kermode's introduction to *Macbeth*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1311.

[5] See Margaret D. Burrell, "*Macbeth*: A Study in Paradox," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 90 (1954): 167–90, who finds a plethora of antonymic clauses, dual rhetorical constructions, and "contrapuntal rhythms," which she labels the "double talk" of the play.

antithesis and other paradoxes have often been seen as linguistic re-flections of the witches' diabolical purpose to create not just stormy weather but cosmological disorders of great magnitude. Language full of antithesis and inversion, that is, reflects in its grammatical fusion and confusion of opposites a world without difference and thus without the individuation so necessary to make orderly sense of things.[6] From a Christian perspective (not the only one licensed by the play's text, of course), a day that is "foul and fair" suggests the state of that pri-mordial ocean in Genesis which necessitated, besides light, the firma-ment of God's creation to establish boundaries for understanding. Thus, the paradoxes in the witches' language are a perfect expression of the essence of forces in the world that work against the rational order God created in the beginning. These chaotic dimensions are explicitly stated in a number of lines, most notably in Macbeth's conjuring of the witches in the cauldron scene (4.1.50–61). Moreover, the repeated imagery of day and night or light and dark, like the play's focus on time, is im-plicitly relevant to the biblical version of the origin of the cosmos. As many have noted, *Macbeth* makes clear the resultant disorder in the uni-verse when degree is shaken by forces that speak in antitheses.

But this interpretation, while somewhat compelling, is incomplete. For the language of the Weird Sisters is not simply polar and para-doxical; it is not simply double-talk. Rather, the tune and words of the witches' lines are dominated by poetic repetitions as well as semantic oppositions. Through the most self-conscious manipulation of poetry —including diction, rhyme, alliteration, anaphora, chiasmus, rhythm, and meter—Shakespeare clogs the witches' verse with repetitive forms, doubling, tripling, and even quadrupling them. Indeed, the manner of the Weird Sisters' speech is at least as prominent as its meaning.

Opening scenes are supposed to "set the scene," giving the audience temporal and spatial bearings. Here, the witches ask the right questions (when, where, how), but their answers are terribly vague and unsatis-fying (sometime after the battle and before sunset, on the heath, and by hovering). Their tune, however, provides something memorable to fill the ideational blanks: repeated sounds. As far as rhyme is concerned, there are three couplets, one triplet, and three short unrhymed lines. If we look at the beginning of the lines, in addition, we find an unlikely "Where. . . . There" (1.1.6–7) rhyme, which is eventually picked up in "Fair" (11). Lines 3–6, the triplet, contain the internal rhyming of "hurly-

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[6] See G. I. Duthie, "Antithesis in 'Macbeth,'" *Shakespeare Survey* 19 (1966): 5–33.

burly," the second and third repetition of the opening "When" clause, and the rhythmically similar short sentences, "Where the place? Upon the heath." Finally, the famous eleventh line is a chiasmus, a reversed repetition, and the line's alliteration is repeated a third and fourth time in the "fog and filthy air" phrase that follows (11–12). No other lines in Shakespeare, neither the fairies' talk in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* nor the satirized bad poetry of *Love's Labor's Lost*, much less the verse of supernatural characters elsewhere in Shakespeare, can match this concatenation of sounds, this poetic compulsion to repetition.[7]

The meter is even more interesting. One scholar calls the major metrical form here trochaic tetrameter catalectic but thinks it "is better described as a seven-syllable verse—used with the freedom of doggerel in a way characteristic of a child's mind."[8] In a play full of children and the lack thereof, the childish appeal of a nursery rhyme is not inappropriate. As the child's mind is often distinguished both by its imaginative capacities and its love of poetic repetition, moreover, it is not surprising that the witches' words so easily seduce Macbeth, whose imagination so dominates his character, whose achievement of manhood is always in question, and whose repeated attempts to demonstrate the independence of imagined adulthood so often involves attacks on the children of others. Western European fairy tales, of course, consistently present witches seducing children into danger.

Carefully scanned, however, not much of the verse of the witches here and elsewhere is as rough and jerky as doggerel, though it is heavy-footed and variable.[9] Six of the first seven lines, for example, are very regular trochaic tetrameter catalectic, the only variant being the spondee in the second foot of line 1, which emphasizes both the word "three" and the internal *e* rhyme in the line. (The sixth line, of course, is shared by two speakers.) Line 2 is iambic tetrameter, though broken into three phrases by caesuras, and the seventh is either trochaic trimeter with an iambic third foot or two amphimacer feet, an alteration that underlines the off-rhymed consonance (*heath-beth*) in line 8 which adds finality

[7] Many readers find the style of the play distinctive. I have discovered occasional sections of other Shakespearean dramas with similar doubling or tripling repetition, especially in *Hamlet*, but these plays have much less of the characteristic style overall, many fewer heavy concentrations of it, fewer repetitions per speech in those concentrations, and no lines that call attention to the verse at the start.

[8] H. N. Paul, *The Royal Play of Macbeth* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), 294.

[9] In scanning the verse of *Macbeth*, I have endeavored to follow the metrical views of George T. Wright, *Shakespeare's Metrical Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

to the locational questions posed and answered by the sisters. Overall, the dominant trochaic tetrameter catalectic lines function to underscore stylistic repetitions. Lines 2 through 4, for example, besides offering an isomorphic metrical triplet, highlight with heavy stress both the *done-won-sun* rhyme and the last two of the three "When" openers that begin the play.

The final lines of the scene, as printed by most modern editors, begin with short outbursts in prose from each of the three witches and then a unison chant of two lines, the first in trochaic tetrameter catalectic and the second in either iambic tetrameter with a trochaic first foot (if "Hover" is elided) or trochaic tetrameter with an extra syllable. I think, nevertheless, that lines normally numbered 8 through 10 are a triple sharing of one iambic pentameter line: "I come, Graymalkin. Paddock calls. Anon." While taking nothing away from the triplicity of the prose reading, such a scansion is consistent with the sisters' verse overall. The witches are seldom prosaic in any sense of the word. (The Folio, however, has all three witches prefix "Padock calls anon" to line 11, creating a six-foot line with a heavy caesura that breaks the pattern of the preceding lines, thereby obfuscating the usual triple sharing of them and their metrical pattern while also reducing the symmetry of the final couplet. I think that modern editors, for logical and structural reasons, have improved the text but have fallen short of a typography that would enable visualization of the pentameter.) Finally, the metrical construction of the famous final couplet functions to highlight the chiasmic antithesis in the two pairs of *f*-alliterated words heard in the first line, only to emphasize the explanatory consistency of the third pair of *f*-alliterated words in the last line. (Simultaneously, the caesura in line 11 breaks the alliterated pairs into three phrases.) Also, the stress of the last lines falls heavily on the "fair" repetition/internal rhyme and the *fair-air* end rhyme, another stylistic doubling and tripling.

What is the significance of this? On the one hand, the tune clearly distinguishes the witches from the human characters, who always speak in blank verse, rhymed iambic pentameter, or prose. But like their human counterparts, on the other hand, the witches speak with neither perfect metrical regularity nor with the "freedom of doggerel." They speak in a variety of unusual but largely regular meters, including iambic pentameter. Their verse does not, as some have supposed, render them wholly diabolical and inhuman. Most interestingly, their predominant line here, trochaic tetrameter catalectic with a strong caesura ("Fair is

foul, and foul is fair"), is really an ambiguous conflation of both tro-
chaic and iambic feet. It begins strongly trochaic but feels iambic after
the break, a kind of metronomic seesaw as noted above. Their meter,
then, is an appropriate rhythmic vehicle for the paradoxical semantics,
occasional rhymes, and often chiasmic repetition of the words it under-
scores. The medium of poetry is, in part, the message of the witches;
Shakespeare used all his poetic powers to craft this short opening scene.

By contrast, the second scene in act 1 has over five times the number
of lines, and the stylistic patterns heard in the first scene are greatly di-
minished. Rhymes and repetitions per line are a fraction of what has
been heard before, and the characters, now human simulacra, speak no
childish tetrameters. The blank verse in scene 2 also contains numerous
metrical irregularities, so-called "feminine" endings, extra or missing
syllables, and sharply cauterized lines (1.2.20, 38, 42, 52, 60, 68) charac-
teristic of Shakespeare's mature style.

There are, however, a few signs of similarity between the scenes; a
small number of dictional and alliterative repetitions can be detected.
For example, the bloodied and weakened captain describes in mirror-
ing phraseology how "merciless Macdonwald / Worthy to be a rebel"
is aided by Fortune "like a rebel's whore," yet he is still unseamed by
"brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)," who disdains Fortune
"Like Valor's minion" (1.2.9–23). The wounded captain then reports
that "Bellona's bridegroom" and Banquo, "As cannons overcharg'd with
double cracks; / So they / Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe" (37–
39), after which, as noted above, Duncan gives Cawdor's title to Mac-
beth in couplets, with help from Rosse (66–69). These lines, of course,
unlike many delivered by the witches, are not full of paradox; they do
not outrun pausing reason, our orderly cognition. Yet the lines con-
tain our first description of Macbeth, and however diminished in quan-
tity and mystery, the few doublings and triplings noted may un-
consciously associate the titular hero with the Weird Sisters. Overall,
however, scene 2 is a poetic contrast to its predecessor.

The next scene is marked by the immediate return of the witches and
many more repetitive formulae: "And mounched" thrice (1.3.5), "I'll
do" thrice (10), "show me" twice (27), "A drum" twice (30), "All hail"
thrice and "hail to thee" twice (48–50), "Hail" thrice (62–64), and "So
all hail, Macbeth and Banquo! / Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!" (67–68).
Furthermore, the witches end their charm against the sailor with the
following:

> The Weird Sisters, hand in hand,
> Posters of the sea and land,
> Thus do go about, about:
> Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
> And thrice again, to make up nine
> Peace!—the charm's wound up.
>   (1.3.32–37)

Both the tetrameter (trochaic catalectic and iambic) and the rhymed couplets underscore the dictional repetition here, as they do in most of the witches' verse throughout the scene. Thus the repetitive essence of the witches' tune is highlighted by their return in 1.3 as well as by Macbeth and Banquo's aforementioned imitation of them later in the scene.

But can anyone hear the witches' tune? H. N. Paul believes that the witches' poetry is "the controlling influence which the dramatist never lets the audience forget. This influence is felt by anyone who has ears to hear."[10] However, in our oculocentric age, not many in a typical audience (except, perhaps, some rappers) will recognize the repetitive stylistic formulae even after the witches' chanting and the attention paid to their tune and words by Macbeth and Banquo. Even fewer, if any, will recognize the occasional music in 1.2. By contrast, Renaissance English playgoers might easily hear these repetitive stylistic patterns. While the plays were spectacles for many, especially the poorest and least educated, we know from *The Taming of the Shrew* (Induction.1.92) that Shakespeare and his contemporaries spoke also of "hearing" a play, and we know too that the highly rhetorical Renaissance education and the preponderance of poetry in the art of the age would train, by study and experience, a finer ear than we possess. Ann Cook argues for the predominance of "privileged audiences with superior educations," and Coburn Freer suggests that Shakespeare's audience "would have been able to hear the meter of the verse and the rhythmic patterns superimposed upon it."[11] Even if audiences in public theaters were not all or always so sensitive and thoughtful, it is probable that *Macbeth* was written to be first presented in court, where one of the most cultured and intelligent audiences that could be assembled in England would hear it.[12] Such an

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[10] Paul, *Royal Play*, 262–63.

[11] Ann Jennalie Cook, *The Privileged Playgoers of Shakespeare's London, 1596–1642* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), 273–74; Coburn Freer, *The Poetics of Jacobean Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 35.

[12] See Alvin Kernan, *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court, 1603–*

audience might be aware of the finest of rhythmic and rhetorical repetitions and knowledgeable enough to make educated guesses about their significance. Finally, the dramatic poet who deftly shifts between blank verse and prose in plays like *1 Henry IV* or who embeds a sonnet in *Romeo and Juliet* must have some confidence in the ear of his audience.

Having re-established their characteristic music in 1.3, the Weird Sisters disappear, for Shakespeare if not for an interpolator, until the inception of act 4:

> *1 Witch:* Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.
> *2 Witch:* Thrice, and once the hedge-pig whin'd.
> *3 Witch:* Harpier cries:—'Tis time, 'tis time.
>
> (4.1.1–3)

In the sisters' return here, their characteristic poetry contrasts immediately with the plain blank verse of Lenox and a Lord in the preceding scene. The witches' dictional doublings in unrhymed trochaic tetrameter catalectic soon give way to even more characteristic rhymed couplets in the same handful of meters analyzed earlier, though these verses repeat few words, even during the famous chorus: "Double, double, toil and trouble, / Fire burn; and, cauldron, bubble," which is heard three times (10–11, 20–21, 35–36). While dictional repetition wanes, however, the sisters' brew of selected body parts from slimy, nocturnal, violent animals, from infidels, and from dead babies is flavored with rhyme (e.g., "double . . . bubble . . . trouble"), heavy alliteration (e.g., "Lizard's leg," "Gall of goat," "Turk, and Tartar's"), and largely mono- and disyllabic diction. As Macbeth approaches, moreover, we find internal rhyme (46–47, but a single line in the Folio) and three perfect iambic feet that immediately follow two iambs by the hero (49). This musical yoking of Macbeth and the Weird Sisters is repeated when the latter answer Macbeth's question by completing in one, two, and then three syllables a perfect feminine iambic pentameter line: "To what I ask you. / Speak. / Demand. / We'll answer" (61). Two more shared lines follow, one in a pentameter so unrhythmic it sounds like prose (62–63) and another in iambic pentameter with a trochaic open-

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1613 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 75–78 and passim, and Paul, *Royal Play*, 1–13, 317–31, and passim. More recently, Garry Wills, *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 13–31 and passim, believes that *Macbeth* is a topical play, structured as a response to the Gunpowder Plot and written for James I's approval. For a qualifying counterargument, see Michael Hawkins, "History, Politics, and *Macbeth*," in *Focus on "Macbeth,"* ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge, 1982), 155–88, esp. 158, 176, and 185–88.

ing foot (69). Finally, the witches respond individually to Macbeth's demand to see Banquo's descendants with a triple "Show!" (107–9), repeating the word again to begin their final joint couplet (110). Clearly, something close to the original version of the selfsame tune is back.

The apparitions created by the sisters and presented to Macbeth speak largely in iambic pentameter couplets, and the first two repeat the hero's name three times each (71, 76). They also match iambic trimeter lines (76–78) or link split pentameters with the witches and Macbeth (89, 94, 103). Meanwhile, Macbeth's verse by itself seems touched with weird repetition. Upon arrival, for example, his demands begin with "I conjure you . . . answer me" and end with "answer me / To what I ask you," between which six "though" clauses intervene (50–61). He uses the phrase "assurance double sure" (83) in responding to the second apparition, moreover, and tacks on three iambic pentameter couplets to that apparition's two, sharing a fourth couplet with the crowned child (90–101).

Macbeth's reaction to the show of Banquo and the eight kings, however, is not couched in obvious repetitive formulae. This is perhaps appropriate since this vision, unlike the others, leaves him shattered by a fate he cannot control, one result of which is his frustration-driven attack on the dynastically irrelevant family of Macduff. Nevertheless, his words might be repetitive in performance since they redundantly verbalize the vision that he and the audience see, since he notes that the golden hair of the kings is much alike (113–15), and since he repeatedly interrupts his description with angry interjections (111, 115, 116, 118, 122, 124). Finally, although the last twenty lines of the scene, in which Macbeth returns to human company (Lenox), show little evidence of repetition, Macbeth's vow that "The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand" (147–48) and the couplet that closes the speech (153–54) hint of the selfsame tune. As in the third scene of act 1, then, Macbeth's speech is linked to that of the witches in a number of ways, though his repetitions of word and sound are less intense and numerous than those of his supernatural solicitors.[13]

[13] Because textual scholars believe that 4.1.39–43 and 125–32, along with 3.5.1–35, were written either by Thomas Middleton or an anonymous dramatist, I have not included them in my analysis of poetic patterns in the play. Hecate, who is prominently featured in these sections, largely speaks quite regular iambic tetrameter, a verse form seldom used by the Weird Sisters. Her poetry and that of *1 Witch* in 4.1.125–32 shows none of the verbal repetition characteristic of the witches, the apparitions, Macbeth, or other characters who seem to chant the selfsame tune. Nevertheless, if Shakespeare or a close collaborator did pen these suspect passages, a case could be made for the appropriateness of

In summary, Shakespeare has clearly established unique auditory patterns at the very beginning of the play, called our attention to them, and brought them back later. The patterns become, I think, a kind of poetic signature for the ambiguous, partly supernatural characters who utter them. But Shakespeare has also suggestively linked some of the patterns to human characters. It is to further description of that linkage that I now turn.

II

While the witches disappear near the end of 1.3, many of the poetic patterns they engendered do not. The selfsame tune, the aural embodiment of their unholy spirit, makes its way into the mouths of several characters. Although now in blank verse, prose, or occasional pentameter couplets, many repetitions in word and tune emerge throughout the rest of the play, most notably in the lines of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and the Porter, especially in private moments when their imaginations are relatively unfettered by the need to keep up public appearances. For example, when Macbeth exits from Duncan's presence after hearing the latter announce the succession of Malcolm, what were only modest repetitive notes (1.4.20–32) or none (33–47) in public conversation with Duncan become, in an aside, three rhymed couplets in which the titular hero invokes the stars three times to hide his evil desires while letting that be done which he fears to expose (48–53). Equally patterned are the soliloquies of Lady Macbeth in the next scene. She begins with an echo of the witches' prophecy and her spouse's report of it, caesuras highlighting the two titles achieved and the third which awaits: "Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be / What thou are promis'd" (1.5.15–

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their form. The tetrameter couplets, for example, could be linked to the witches' speech elsewhere, and the iambic meter could be construed as a way to distinguish and elevate Hecate. Furthermore, the structure of the lines shows signs of characteristic repetition. Hecate's tetrameters in 3.5, for example, are framed at the beginning and the end by a set of three irregular pentameter lines consisting of a witch's unrhymed line and a couplet by the triple goddess herself (1–3 and 34–36). Likewise, the apparent interpolations in 4.1 frame, in tetrameter couplets, the witches' visionary shows, another structural repetition. Finally, both Hecate's appearances and the words of *1 Witch* are followed by music (see the Folio SD at 3.5.33 and the hints of music and dance in 4.1), the first two including songs which, according to late seventeenth-century versions of the play, come from Middleton's *The Witch*. Could these musical interludes symbolically suggest that the divine Hecate is related to the music of the spheres, in which was inscribed the plan of the universe? Could the poetic framings suggest by their containment a similar classical and medieval orthodoxy?

16). There follows an analysis of her husband chock full of the selfsame tune:

> Thou wouldst be great:
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,
> That wouldst thou holily; 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.
>
> (1.5.18–25)

She then makes her treble invocations to the "murd'ring ministers" and "sightless substances" to "Come" (three times) and invade her body (40–54), finally greeting Macbeth with another repetition of her opening triad, "Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor! / Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter!" (54–55), again in imitation of witches she has never seen.[14]

But the most striking example of the witches' tune in the human mind is Macbeth's famous soliloquy at Inverness:

> *Macb.:* If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
> It were done quickly: if th' assassination
> Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
> With his surcease success; that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all—here,
> But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
> We'd jump the life to come.—But in these cases,
> We still have judgment here.
>
> (1.7.1–8)

After merely minor repetitions in the intervening scene (1.6), the patterns in this speech (only a part of which I have quoted in the interest of brevity) seem crafted to bring the supernatural powers to mind. The first line and a half present an array of triples: three phrases beginning "it were" and three ending with "done" (perhaps echoing the first witch's "I'll do, I'll do, I'll do" at 1.3.10). The remainder of the long first sentence doubles the conditional nature of its beginning, repeating the "if," and then presents its own series of doubled and tripled alliterative and repetitive terms: "could . . . consequences . . . catch," "surcease suc-

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[14] See Williams, "Verbal Echoing," 154–56.

cess," "but . . . blow," "be . . . be-all," "be-all . . . end-all," and "here, /
But here . . . / But . . . here."

Alliterative verbal patterning continues occasionally in the rest of the
speech, but more striking are the longer patterns taken by Macbeth's
thoughts on Duncan in lines 12 through 25. Macbeth says Duncan is at
Inverness "in double trust" but then gives three reasons for that trust—
kin, subject, host—within two rhetorical structures ("First . . . then").
Next, Macbeth adds a third and fourth structure ("Besides") when he
cites Duncan's virtues and the likely universal reaction their "taking-
off" will cause. These patterns, it should be noted, occur in speech that
is not illogical in thought or antithetical in form, though it is full of con-
science and wishful imagination. In fact, Macbeth decides on the basis
of this meditation to call off the immoral deed. However, the music of
his thought and the quantitative inexactitude of his reasoning subtly ex-
pose the strength of the unconscious wishes he has previously acknowl-
edged to us, wishes his lady will count on.[15] Thus, when Lady Macbeth
attacks his manhood and reassures him of success a mere fifty lines after
this resolution to be faithful to Duncan, Macbeth promises quite mys-
teriously and quickly to "bend up / Each corporal agent" (1.7.80–81) to
do the deed, as though he harbors the same "sightless substances" his
wife had called to invade her being. Interestingly, their dialogue con-
tains some repetitive elements: for instance, "I dare do all . . . Who dares
do more" (46–47), "then you were a man . . . be more than what you
were . . . Be so much more the man" (49–51), "make . . . made . . . un-
make" (52–54), "fail . . . fail? . . . fail" (58–61), and various alliterations
(65–69). But it is Macbeth's final lines that most clearly echo the music
of the witches in their diction, alliteration, and rhyme: "Away, and mock
the time with fairest show: / False face must hide what the false heart
doth know" (82–83).[16]

[15] See Huston Diehl, "Horrid Image, Sorry Sight, Fatal Vision: The Visual Rhetoric of
Macbeth," *Shakespeare Studies* 16 (1983): 191–203, for the view that Macbeth fails morally
because he creates but does not understand the images that seduce and haunt him. See
also Arnold Stein, "Macbeth and Word-Magic," *Sewanee Review* 59 (1951): 271–84, for the
idea that Macbeth falls on account of his self-conscious verbal magic, powers he uses on
and for himself alone. My own opinion is that Macbeth's use of language is as much out
of his conscious control as in it, and that the rush of his poetry motivates his actions as
much as the images his imagination generates.

[16] These closing lines and the earlier ones of Rosse and Duncan in 1.2 can be related, of
course, to Shakespeare's well-known habit of ending scenes with couplets. But interest-
ingly, *Macbeth* is second only to *Richard II* among the tragedies for the number of couplets
that close its scenes; given its relative brevity, *Macbeth* is unusually full of these closing

The opening scene of act 2 gives us a clearer sense of Shakespeare's stylistic designs because when Banquo and Fleance speak with Macbeth, their lines exhibit no repetition and only minimal alliteration. The lines themselves, significantly, express what Banquo believes is a victory, supported by "Merciful Powers" (2.1.7), over thoughts stirred up by dreams of the witches (20). No evil desires, no music. But later, when Macbeth, in soliloquy, sees a visionary dagger, associates himself with witchcraft, and moves toward Duncan's chamber (33–64), lines reminiscent of the witches return: for example, the repetition of "Is this a dagger, which I see before me, . . . yet I see thee still . . . I see thee yet . . . I see thee still"; the alliteration of "world . . . wicked . . . witchcraft . . . withered . . . wolf . . . watch"; and two pairs of couplets at the end, separated by the ringing of a bell and a line acknowledging its invitation to get the deed "done." Express evil desires in image and action, especially when alone, and bells ring during musical speech. The assassination, of course, is not seen: we know it only in its aftermath through the conversation of the conspirators. That is, the audience only hears about it through repetitions of "done," "deed," "sorry sight," "Amen," "sleep no more," "hand," and "knocking" (2.2.10–73).

The next heavy concentration of the selfsame tune and words in the speeches of Scotland's king and queen occurs in the final act, but it is now a vehicle for their pain. We last hear the strange rhythms during Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene and her husband's soliloquy at her death. In the former, the Lady speaks the witches' sing-song with eyes open but sense shut, and we get a rare glimpse of her unconscious mind as it expresses the horror of compulsive guilt, symbolized as well in gesture by her repetitious, unsuccessful hand-washing. The nightmare that begins with repeated worry about a spot (5.1.30–33) ends with this extraordinary set of iterations:

> To bed, to bed: there's knocking at the gate.
> Come, come, come, come, give me your hand.
> What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.
>
> (5.1.63–65)

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rhymes, particularly when compared to other late tragedies. Beyond following convention, why else does the Bard rhyme so much in this play? The question will never be answered definitively, but this increase in the play's repetition of sounds is probably not unrelated to the verbal music I have taken pains to describe. The selfsame tune may be the answer, and the affinity with *Richard II* may be instructive. Both plays are hierarchical tragedies involving regicide, and both give ample space to expressions of belief in a providential, hierarchical, and correspondent worldview while never endorsing that belief system overtly.

All of her words are fixed on past actions, which she relives in the un-chronological, repetitive, and circular order suggestive of mental disturbance, of Freudian primary process brought to the surface of consciousness. For example, she begins with the blood stains discovered after Duncan's murder (30, 33), reverts to the bell that sends Macbeth to do the deed (33–34), goes back even further to the words by which she persuaded her fearful husband to act (35–37), comes back to the murder (37–38), speaks of Lady Macduff's demise (40), repeats her worries about bloodstained hands (41, 47–48) and post-mortem directions to Macbeth (42–43, 58–59), speaks "yet again" about Banquo's ghost (59–60), and finally returns to the knocking at the gate (63–65).

Poetic patterns reinforce these repetitive topics. Lady Macbeth demands twice that the "spot" clean itself "out" and counts to two, reliving the timing of the bell (30–33). Two phrases remind us of the witches: "Hell is murky" (34) and the nursery-rhyme line, "The Thane of Fife had a wife" (40). Moreover, she admonishes her lord twice with "No more o' that" (42), speaks of the smell of blood in two phrases (47–48), says "Oh" thrice (49), commands her husband three times (58–59), and ends her sleep-talking with a pair of demands to go "To bed," four behests to "come," the rhyming and repetitive claim that "What's done cannot be undone," and three more commands "To bed" (63–65).

Meanwhile, the Doctor who has watched twice before but only seen her sleepwalk on this third night, analyzes the queen's nocturnal performance in repetitions too: "Well, well, well" (53), "Go to, go to" (44), "Unnatural deeds / Do breed unnatural troubles" (68–69), "God, god, forgive us all" (72), and "So, good night: / My mind she has mated, and amazed my sight" (74–75). In addition, the godly Gentlewoman who also attends (see ll. 46 and 54) no doubt supports his view that Lady Macbeth's "infected" mind more needs "the divine than the physician" (69–71); she closes the scene saying, repetitively, "Good night, good doctor" (76). Both the infected and the good speak the selfsame tune, though the queen's duplicated diction, rhyme, and alliteration are clearly more compulsive and illogical.

The last repetitive flourish for Macbeth is his famous speech to Seyton after the death of his wife (5.5.17–28). The tyrant, alone with his last loyal retainer (whose name may suggest satanic influence), waxes philosophical about meaningless repetition in action. The speech gives us "to-morrow" thrice, "out" and "time" twice, and "day to day," along with the alliteration of "have . . . hereafter," "petty pace," "dusty death," "poor player," "tale / Told," and "full . . . fury," all adding to the idea

of life's iterative futility. It is appropriate, I think, that elements of the witches' tune cluster in a final statement of the despair that results when one develops, by choice or fate, a relationship with the mysterious powers which the witches represent.

The most powerful expression of the witches' tune after the Macbeths' words comes in the Porter's speech. As many scholars have shown, this speech and its speaker do not function simply as comic relief; rather, the speech has been considered symbolic of the hellish quality of Macbeth's castle now that Duncan is dead, and the Porter has been called a descendant of the gatekeeper in the medieval mystery play about the harrowing of hell.[17] I would argue further that the poetic patterns in the speech, the repetitive doublings and triplings we have seen before, hint of strange forces operating in the mind of this sleepy, inebriated fellow as he experiences, mostly in soliloquy, a supernatural hangover:

> /*Knocking within.*/
> Porter: Here's a knocking, indeed! If a man were Porter
> of Hell Gate, he should have old turning the key.
> /*Knocking.*/ Knock, knock, knock. Who's there,
> i'th'name of Belzebub?
>
> (2.3.1–4)

The most striking element in the speech is the knocking, of course. Before they retire, Macbeth and his consort have responded to two knocks apiece with fear of the "knocking" (2.2.56, 64, 68, 73), and the Porter hears and responds similarly with a fifth gerund, thus linking the three characters and capping the second pair of knocks with a third. The Porter then responds to five more off-stage knocks, twice with "knock, knock, knock" (3, 12), twice with "Knock, knock" (7, 15) and once with "Anon, anon" (20) just before the entrance of Macduff and Lenox. Moreover, he asks, "Who's there?" three times (3, 8, 13) after three of the knocks (twice asking in the name of a devil), tells three imaginary visitants to "Come in" (5, 13, 15) thrice (cf. Lady Macbeth's soliloquy earlier), and recognizes his role as hell-porter three times (1, 17, 21), to mention the most obvious examples.

In his discussion with Macduff (22–40), furthermore, the Porter speaks of drinking until the "second cock" (24) and points out the "three things" (25) such drinking provokes, a statement which elicits from

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[17] Glynne Wickham, "Hell Castle and its Door-keeper," *Shakespeare Survey* 19 (1966): 68–74.

Macduff a repetition of the same phrase in the form of a question. The drunken doorman then lists the three results of drink, followed by a discourse on a fourth (lechery) in which he repeats the word "provokes" three times (once in the negative) and alliterates the term with "performance." He then begins four sets of antitheses on the effects of liquor on lechery, framing these antitheses with remarks on drink as an "equivocator." Finally, he puns on the word "lie" with Macduff three times. So it is not simply the Porter's dramatic heritage that allusively relates him to the witches; rather, his humorous prose is peppered with their music.[18]

The poetic repetition in the rest of the play is much less dense. For example, the rest of this scene contains some, but much less, repetitious language. Though there are somewhat repetitive morning greetings and questions about whether Duncan is awake, minor alliteration (2.3.56, 63), Macduff's triple "horror" (62) at the discovery of the king's death, Donalbain's realistic fear about "the near in blood, / The nearer bloody" (138–39), and Malcolm's closing couplet, only Macbeth's repeated orders to wake up others and his partly repetitious manner ("love" and "heart" twice, "breach" and "breech'd," "gashed stabs" and "gore") during the cover-up for killing the chamberlains (109–16) stand out much, if at all, in this lengthy public discourse of over a hundred lines. This diminution may relate to the public nature of the discourse and to the fact that most of the characters express orthodox medieval Christian belief as they react to the murder of the monarch. Lenox, for example, brings up simultaneous events in the natural kingdom that correspond, according to medieval cosmology, to the king's death in the political one (53–60). Macduff, moreover, calls it "sacrilegious" to destroy the "Lord's anointed Temple" (66–67), and Banquo, suspecting deceitful treason, claims to stand "In the great hand of God" (128). As at the beginning of 2.2, Shakespeare shapes the poetic language of his characters to fit their situation and beliefs: the more godly, the less repetitive.

The last scene in the second act confirms this view. As the Old Man and Rosse report correspondent "unnatural" astronomical and animal prodigies "like the deed that's done" (2.4.11), and as Rosse and Macduff discuss appropriate public responses to the murder and its aftermath, we hear almost no repetitions. Only minor alliteration, the repe-

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[18] See Frederic B. Tromly, "Macbeth and His Porter," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 26 (1975): 151–56, who contends that "the Porter describes the power of drink in terms which suggest demoniacal possession" (155), a state closely associated with Renaissance witchcraft and one that Lady Macbeth (1.5.40–54) and her husband (3.2.46–53) try to will for themselves.

tition of "Scone" (31, 35), and the now-expected final couplets (37–41) remind us, if at all, of the witches. In a public scene full of "God's benison" (40), this should come as no surprise. While there remains a sense that all Scotland is bewitched, only Macbeth and those closest to him, especially those discovered in private moments, speak the recognizably repetitious language of the witches throughout the play.

Act 3 offers only a few moments of the witches' tune and follows the pattern already established. Act 4 is similar, but here Shakespeare's manipulation of repetitions in word and sound changes slightly too. At Macduff's castle, Rosse, Lady Macduff, and her son indulge in what might be called argumentative repetition. These repeated arguments are overtly more a matter of rational debate than a matter of wish, fear, or imagination, though the psyches of both family members are not secure. Yet only Lady Macduff's description of her son, "Father'd he is, and yet he's fatherless" (4.2.27), sounds like the witches' tune. This riddle, unlike those of the Weird Sisters, however, has been solved for an audience by information about Macduff's whereabouts imparted before the scene begins. In addition, there are no rhymes or other repeated sounds in the scene.

I should also point out that this scene includes a messenger (like the servant who fights Cornwall in *King Lear*) who tries unsuccessfully to save the family, framing his attempt in terms that imply belief in a benign divinity: "Bless you, fair dame!" and "Heaven preserve you!" (4.2.64–71). As before, when orthodoxy appears, the witches' tune is usually minimized, though never wholly absent. Such is also the case in the next scene, the longest in the play (240 lines) and the only one set in England. The presence of orthodox religious elements, such as Macduff's description of Malcolm's saintly father and mother (4.3.108–11), or Malcolm's calls to "God above" (120) to heal the rift with Macduff and later to "Good God" (162) for help in befriending Rosse, or the miraculous heavenly cure for scrofula the English monarch possesses and passes down to his successors (140–59), may explain why the middle of this scene is lacking in much poetic iteration. Of course, the sheer length of the scene, fitting as a slow contrast to the speed of Scotland's evils, reduces one's recognition of repetitive elements in the language as well.

There are still some repetitions, however, and their context and quality begin to change. First, repetitious constructions begin to emboss public descriptions of Scotland's butcheries, including the pain and paranoia they cause. Second, the selfsame tune and words also begin

to be employed in public descriptions of Christian faith by the forces that oppose Macbeth. For example, Malcolm and Macduff's opening discourse on evil in Scotland and their consequent distrust is expressed in repetitive formulae: "new" four times (4.3.4–5), four "What I . . . , I'll . . ." clauses (8–11), and Malcolm's wary lines,

> That which you are my thoughts cannot transpose:
> Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell:
> Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace,
> Yet Grace must still look so.
>
> (21–24)

Unlike earlier iterative language from Macbeth, however, Malcolm's statement distrusting appearances makes easy sense in context and assumes the continued existence of bright angels and a God of grace.

After a period of little or no repetition during Malcolm's test of Macduff's morality and patriotism (44–137), the latter explains his silent response to the test as bewilderment in the face of "Such welcome and unwelcome things at once" (138). This repetition, unlike the witches' mysterious "fair is foul," is a reasonable reaction to Malcolm's role-playing. Similarly, the scene ends with repeated understandable expressions of Macduff's emotional disbelief and horror at the murder of his wife and children: four uses of "all" (204–19), several questions about and prayers to "heaven" (207, 223, 227, 231), a few words on what is "manly" (220, 221, 235), and a final couplet, "Receive what cheer you may. / The night is long that never finds the day" (239–40). These reminders of the witches' tune are unambiguous and antithetical in meaning to the thoughts of the sisters or the Macbeths; they either acknowledge painful victimization, suggest faith in a benign providential power, make clear two different human (or male) responses to personal loss, or express hope for amelioration in time. Moreover, the number of these reminders is small, and the length of the scene may render them unheard.

Nevertheless, stylistic elements formerly associated with the house of Macbeth and before that with the witches are, if recognizable, now associated as well with the forces of redemption. Outside Scotland, in a land governed by a king whose supernatural skills, including "a heavenly gift of prophecy" (157), are similar in strength to the witches' powers, the selfsame tune becomes also the manly tune (235). This limited sharing of the weird language may be appropriate at this point in the play, for the prophecies of the apparitions created by the witches in 4.1 suggest the

importance of Macduff and imply a kind of natural movement towards
Dunsinane which threatens Macbeth. Just as Macbeth and those close
to him had a hand in carrying out some of the witches' early prophe-
cies, so Malcolm and Macduff will help bring to pass the prophecies in
this late act. All who play out the mandates of time share some of the
selfsame verse, however small the amount.

Aside from 5.1, the rest of the last act contains only sporadic sections
of iterative formulae. The last eight scenes are so public and so brief, it is
clear that Shakespeare is following his previous stylistic pattern.[19] Still,
each scene has at least one rhymed couplet, and most close with at least
two. Macbeth speaks most of the rhymes, but Siward, the Doctor, Lenox,
Macduff, and Malcolm also chime in. Much of the dictional repetition
is simply Macbeth's reiteration of the prophecies made by the witches'
apparitions. He repeats six times, for example, the prophecy about not
fearing a man born of woman (5.3.4, 6; 5.7.3, 11, 13; 5.8.13). Other itera-
tions involve rhetorical resurgence by minor rebels ("Now . . . Now . . .
Now" and "march we . . . Meet we . . . pour we" in 5.2.16–29), Macbeth's
calls to "Seyton" (5.3. 19, 20, 29) and to his armorers (5.3.33, 36, 47), and
some minor alliterations here and there. Some of this might strike the
ears of an attentive audience, but most of it lacks the condensed reitera-
tive intensity found in Lady Macbeth's sleeptalking at the beginning of
the act.

The pattern changes in the final scene of the play. As the repetitive
tune has been associated with the witches and the Macbeths heretofore,
its return in the mouths of those who oppose Macbeth represents in part
an ironic suggestion of similarity between the apparently "good" rebels
and the evil forces of tyranny. However, as the selfsame tune may also
represent the seeds of time, a providential force or a destiny given voice
by the witches, its return here in the mouths of the rebels also suggests
their status as God's instruments. After some minor repetitive elements
are sounded in remarks on Siward's son, Macduff, bearing Macbeth's
head on a pole, hails Malcolm as king twice (5.9.20, 25), to which all re-
peat, "Hail, King of Scotland!" (25), thereby bringing the Weird Sisters'
earlier hailing of Macbeth and Banquo, however progressively or ironi-
cally or both, to mind. Through this act and its particular language, the
play seems to come full circle, with tragic, triumphant, and ironic sig-
nificance for both past and future kings. Ultimately, Malcolm's closing

[19] Scenes in the fifth act average 35 lines each, about half the length of scenes in act 1,
the next shortest group, and less than one-third the average length of all scenes.

speech doubles and trebles Macduff's exuberant claim that "the time is free" (21) by promising not to "spend a large expense of time" (26) before repaying his supporters and by assuring everyone that necessary political acts in the new era of earls will be "planted newly with the time" (31), done expeditiously but not unnaturally. Otherwise, says Malcolm, whatever necessity

> That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace
> We will perform in measure, time, and place.
> So thanks to all at once and to each one,
> Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone.
> (5.9.37–41)

The repetitive tune ("grace of Grace," "Grace/place," "once . . . one," "one . . . Scone") is couched here in an almost perfect iambic pentameter. Rhyme and repetition now adorn the creation of a monarchy, under God, that promises to operate in an orderly way. The music of Malcolm's invitation, especially its repetitive suggestion of divine oneness at the close of the tragedy, brings the witches' poetry together with its ideational opposite. However apparently antithetical to Scotland's flawed polity and morality and however ironically similar his poetry is to the selfsame tune of witches, earlier regicides, and hellish functionaries, Malcolm's graceful promise resonates also as a celebration of an abstract Christian ideal.

III

This review of the repetitive poetry of *Macbeth* suggests a number of possibilities for meaning. First, given that the most distinctive poetic repetitions are established by and identified with the witches, the characteristics of the style may have implications for understanding their nature and vice versa. The shape of the style—both repetition *per se* and its usual form, doublings and triplings—have much in common with some key characteristics of the witches. Second, that the witches' tune is next most powerfully heard in the mouths of the Macbeths and their porter, especially when they are wishful, imaginative, or drunk, may signify the presence of supernatural forces—"Spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts" (1.5.40–41)—in psyches whose reason, God's viceroy, is besieged and weakened. Moreover, the form of the verse seems to have much in common with the character and actions of the infected characters. Third, that the least powerful expression of this repetitive

music occurs occasionally in public scenes, especially when religious orthodoxies are invoked, establishes a group in opposition to, though also partly influenced by, the "sightless substances" (1.5.49). Fourth, since all Scotland is touched by the tune and especially since the revenging forces clearly sing it at the end, Shakespeare may be representing through the witches' stylistic signature a power inclusive of but greater than the merely demonic: a fatal or providential force.

First, the witches. While several scholars have tried to pin down precisely which witches Shakespeare copied directly when he wrote *Macbeth*, it is probable that his Weird Sisters imitate a number of models.[20] The sisters have been identified exclusively with English or Scottish witches, with Fates or Furies, and even with Scandinavian deities.[21] In the text, however, Shakespeare's witches are complex: human (petty, lowly hags), supernatural (capable of flight and instant disappearance), transsexual (bearded women), related to demons or fairies (by their familiars), and capable of reading or making fatal predictions (the seeds of time). That the witches are complex and mysterious accords with Shakespeare's treatment of the supernatural in other tragedies, which seldom allow for supernatural certainties.

In Renaissance England and the Jacobean court, furthermore, the reality of witches was not a foregone conclusion. Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) had exposed the superstitions involved, though King James's *Daemonologie* (1597) lent some credence to the facticity of witchcraft. But even the monarch's position in this matter is not perfectly clear. While his earlier personal involvement in the North Berwick case (held to be a plot by witches against his life while king of Scotland) may have strengthened his belief in witches, his later investigations as king of England exhibit growing skepticism on the question.[22] Thus, ambiguity about the nature of the witches pervades both historical and dramatic contexts.

[20] See S. T. Coleridge, *Coleridge's Writings on Shakespeare*, ed. Terrence Hawkes (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), 197. See Paul, *Royal Play*, 75–130, for an example of scholarly attempts to simplify and clearly define Shakespeare's witches.

[21] See Robert West, *Shakespeare and the Outer Mystery* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1968), 41–55 and 72–79; Kathryn Briggs, *Pale Hecate's Team* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), 77–81, 222; Arthur McGee, "'Macbeth' and the Furies," *Shakespeare Survey* (1966): 55–67; Robert Rentoul Reed, Jr., *The Occult on the Tudor and Stuart Stage* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1965), 168–71; and Anthony Harris, *Night's Black Agents: Witchcraft and Magic in Seventeenth-Century Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 33–63.

[22] See Paul, *Royal Play*, 75–130; Harris, *Night's Black Agents*, 7–19; and Kernan, *King's Playwright*, 83–87.

I believe that the witches' diverse, conglomerate nature and mystery is represented aurally by their tune, with its chant-like jangle of several special rhythms and repetitive formulae. But the main characteristics of the tune may help define, not merely reflect, what the witches are. The essence of the tune is repetition, which is often associated, of course, with childish and regressive character and action. Children take pleasure in doing something over and over, seeking immediate gratification without the burden of a memory that might find constant iteration uninteresting or fruitless. Moreover, as noted earlier, regressive repetition is compulsive, driven by instinctual needs. Macbeth's need for security leads to compulsive plotting and killing, for example. Thus, the tune suggests that those who spur Macbeth on are elemental beings who can infiltrate the unconscious minds of others.

Furthermore, repetition is also associated with the unthinking certainty of the habitual and the routine; through repetitive acts, for example, a child seeks a kind of secure autonomy in an uncertain world. Warriors, like today's athletes, also thrive on "second-nature" actions developed by repeated drill. Success in single battle comes by doing without thinking, as in Macbeth's unseaming of Macdonwald without courtesies (1.2.16–23). Finally, repetition partakes of the child's fantasy of timelessness, of never-ending returns that never change, a fantasy both Macbeths briefly share (1.5.54–58 and 1.7.1–7) and one that the witches live out as supernatural creatures.[23] So the selfsame tune associates the witches with the psychological states of the characters they bedevil.

Beyond the consistent fact of repetition itself, the number of repetitions in rhymes, diction, alliteration, and so forth is remarkably consistent in all examples of the selfsame tune. As noted before, most repetitions are doublings and triplings of various formal elements. The multiples themselves are suggestive. The doubling may underscore the witches' ability to confuse, to conflate appearance and reality. As noted earlier, from a Christian perspective, the witches may be seen as confusing God's ways by means of chaotic antitheses and ambiguities, thus motivating human actions destructive of the cosmos, the created order. Macbeth clearly acknowledges this aspect of the sisters' being when, faced with the unexpected truth of Macduff's Caesarian birth, he tells himself in frustration, "And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd, /

[23] See Bruce F. Kawin, *Telling It Again and Again: Repetition in Literature and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972); and Donald W. Foster, "Macbeth's War on Time," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 319–42.

That palter with us in a double sense" (5.8.19–20). That is, poetic dou-
blings reinforce the duplicitous semantics of the witches. Triplings, on
the other hand, have a positive Christian association with the Triune
God. But the number three has also been related to witchcraft and de-
monology. Dante's Satan, for example, is given three faces in one head,
an obvious parody of the Trinity. Medieval sorcerers and necromancers,
moreover, have always shown a predilection for odd numbers, particu-
larly for three, as have, according to superstition, English witches.[24]

Of equal importance is the fact that three is the number of several
classical figures with whom the Weird Sisters are associated in Eliza-
bethan demonology (and in the text of the play). Hecate, for example,
is a triple goddess in classical mythology, not merely the queen of
night, ghosts, magic, and witches; she is a deity "supreme in Heaven,
on earth, and in Tartarus," who, though a Titan, joined the Olympi-
ans, was exalted by Zeus, became an intercessor for human prayers,
and served as a benefactress in politics, war, sport, fishing, and farm-
ing.[25] That Shakespeare understood her triune being is suggested by
Puck's claim that fairies run "By the triple Hecate's team / From the
presence of the sun" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.370–71) and by
Lucianus's statement, in the Mousetrap, that his drug "With Hecate's
ban thrice blasted, thrice infected / Thy natural magic and dire prop-
erty / On wholesome life usurps immediately" (*Hamlet* 3.2.40–44). Mac-
beth's allusions to Hecate (2.2.49–56 and 3.2.40–44) explicitly associate
her with witchcraft and murder, but nothing in her relationship to the
three sisters and their verbal triplicities precludes her classical identifi-
cation as well.

What I am trying to suggest is that the number three, as it applies to
the witches, is not merely a diabolical parody but perhaps also a sign of
more positive, or at least neutral, elemental and universal power. When
we see what the witches' words do to Macbeth's conscience, we think
of the painful but ultimately just Furies, of Hecate in hell. But we may
think as well of the classical Fates, also a threesome and the final arbiters
of all life. In Hesiod, the Moirae are the daughters of Zeus's union with
Themis (law) and are signs of order like her other progeny, "the Hours—
Good Order, Justice, and prosperous Peace."[26] Shakespeare's intention
that these associations be recognized is implied by the fact that the ini-

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[24] Paul, *Royal Play*, 271–73.
[25] Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: I* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1955), 124. See
Hesiod, *Theogony*, trans. Norman O. Brown (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 7.404–52.
[26] *Theogony* 12.899–901.

tially ambiguous predictions of his Weird Sisters are fully worked out in the text and reinforced contextually for a Jacobean audience by the life of James I and knowledge of his ancestry. Indeed, Holinshed calls the sisters "goddesses of destiny," and it is possible that Shakespeare was with King James at Oxford in 1605 when Gwinn's *Tres Sibyllae*, a play in which three fates prophesy that Banquo's descendants will hold power for eternity, was performed for the monarch.[27] Finally, Shakespeare turned to the classics, to Ovid's story of Medea (where she is a sorceress of Hecate throughout) to develop his prophecy scene in act 4. English and Scottish witches apparently did not use cauldrons, but Medea and the Weird Sisters do. Moreover, in Golding's Ovid, all of Medea's rituals, and there are many of them, are done three times.[28]

The selfsame tune, then, in the syncretic, copious manner of Renaissance humanist writings, is appropriate to witches who are multifaceted creatures, synthetic of several traditions. Though the Weird Sisters are, by their destructive, revengeful designs and ambiguous sexuality, largely representations of "unnatural" evil, they are also part of Nature's plan, of the cosmic destiny. Like the devils who ultimately work for God, witches are part of a postlapsarian but still providential universe. Indeed, James's *Daemonologie* explicitly states that Scottish witches could be used by God to punish the wicked: witches work for the devil, and "where the devilles intention in them is euer to perish, either the soule or the body . . . God, by the contrarie, draws euer out of that evill glorie to himselfe."[29] Almost all Renaissance writings on witchcraft support the view that God's will allows the opportunity for demonic activity; to disagree would be to rejuvenate the Manichean heresy.[30] Thus, however apparently antagonistic to God's order, the verbal patterns of the three sisters ultimately suggest a divine origin or fated plan. By the end of the play, it is apparent that the witches can read the "seeds of time" (1.3.58), the order of things, and possibly the blueprint drawn by that Christian fate or fury called Providence.

But why do vestiges of these poetic patterns show up in the minds of other characters? The conventional answer, as noted earlier, is that the

[27] Paul, *Royal Play*, 15–24, 162–82.

[28] Paul, *Royal Play*, 284; McGee, "'Macbeth' and the Furies," 56–57; *Ovid's Metamorphoses: The Arthur Golding Translation (1567)*, ed. J. F. Sims (New York: Macmillan, 1965), book 7.

[29] James I, *Daemonologie, in the Forme of a Dialogue* (1597), ed. G. B. Harrison (London: Curwen, 1924), xiv.

[30] See Wayne Shumaker, *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 99–100.

Weird Sisters, like demons or Furies, penetrate the bodies and minds of those they mean to destroy; the verbal patterns are evidence of demonic possession and/or furious conscience. This could happen in two ways. First, the witches may be thought of as pawns of devils who, according to medieval demonology, take demonic possession of our bodies through our minds. Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking has been called "demoniacal somnambulism."[31] Perhaps her sleep-talking is a sign of the mental gateway for this possession. A variant to this demonological explanation has the witches themselves capable of mental unrest. Scottish witches could apparently vanish, travel through the air, and give us nightmares; if so, the witches' tune could be implanted without demonic inhabitation.[32] Macbeth's and Lady Macbeth's pangs of conscience could be seen merely as the result of harassment by the witches, acting like tormenting Furies.[33]

But the conventional reading is only part of the story. Shakespeare makes clear that the witches' words come to Macbeth before he meets them directly, and characters like the Porter, only tangential to any diabolical plot, or like Malcolm at the end, also sing the tune. Throughout the play, Shakespeare keeps the origin of the pattern a mystery, allowing an audience to think the repetitious language bubbled up independently in several minds. Thus, the pattern represents a power related to but sometimes independent of its manifestation in the witches. The verbal repetitions of three and two (and two doubled, or four) are a medium of cosmic design, manifestations of mysterious universal forces; their classical associations noted above lend support to this broader interpretation.

If the patterns represent cosmic forces at work both in the world and the minds of the characters, thereby adumbrating the play's repeated correspondence of macro- and microcosm, a correspondence at the center of the well-known cosmology of the previous age, there may be yet another way to look at the doublings and triplings in *Macbeth*. Shakespeare may have been trying to tap the occult numerological resources of his times, whether or not he believed in them or in the analogic provi-

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[31] W. C. Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1939), 86–87. Also, see Harris, *Night's Black Agents*, 53–54, who suggests that Lady Macbeth is possessed by a demonic nightmare and that her husband's insomnia and Donalbain's dream show the demon present throughout. Wills, *Witches and Jesuits*, 51–74, goes even further; he thinks Macbeth himself is a male witch.

[32] Paul, *Royal Play*, 299–300.

[33] See Harris, *Night's Black Agents*, 35, and Muir's introduction to *Macbeth*, lvii, which cites Timothy Bright, *A Treatise on Melancholy*.

dential system they usually supported. As others have shown, to do so would not be unusual for a poet or playwright; Spenser often alluded to classical and medieval numerological systems in his poetry, and the architecture and decoration of the Renaissance theater itself may have expressed occult numerological signification.[34] Numerological systems, furthermore, are often integral to traditions of white magic, traditions of which Shakespeare, in *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and here in the figure of Edward the Confessor, shows some understanding. Though *Macbeth* is concerned largely with what, at first glance, is black magic, distinctions between the two were often blurred in the Renaissance. The occultist Cornelius Agrippa, for example, was a white *magus* to some, though to others, including Marlowe's Faustus, he was a black conjurer *(Dr. Faustus* 1.1.111–19).[35] And many of Prospero's theurgic activities are indistinct from the actions of a witch or conjuror.[36] Both the *magus* and the witch tried to take advantage of occult forces hidden in nature. As many incantatory conjurations imply, that control often involved the use of magic numbers.

Since many in the Renaissance questioned the inherited medieval cosmology, however, it is unlikely that the numerological tradition related to it was simplemindedly accepted either. Shakespeare's ironic handling of the Great Chain of Being in *Troilus and Cressida* or his questioning of providential politics in the Lancastrian tetralogy is undeniable. Therefore, I doubt very much that Shakespeare was an occultist in the tradition of someone like John Dee or Agrippa.[37] But since *Macbeth* offers palpable witches as well as clear descriptions (e.g., 2.4.1–30) of the medieval cosmology once overrated by E. M. W. Tillyard and now out of critical fashion, it seems inescapable that Shakespeare knew something of the occult and its numerology. Many of his sources and analogues (such as Plutarch, St. Augustine, du Bartas, and Primaudaye) refer to magic numbers on occasion, and Shakespeare clearly knows something of Pythagoras, the father of numerology. Though Shakespeare's direct references to this ancient philosopher involve the transmigration

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[34] See Alistair Fowler, *Spenser and the Numbers of Time* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964); A. Kent Hieatt, *Short Time's Endless Monument: The Symbolism of the Numbers in Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion"* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960); and Frances Yates, *The Theatre of the World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 67.

[35] Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, in *The Complete Plays of Christopher Marlowe*, ed. Irving Ribner (New York: Odyssey, 1963).

[36] Harris, *Night's Black Agents*, 142–47.

[37] Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), almost suggests as much.

of souls, not the theory of numbers (see *Merchant of Venice* 4.1.131 and *Twelfth Night* 4.2.50, 58), Rosalind associates Pythagoras with excessive rhyming in *As You Like It* (3.2.176–78), and the Pythagorean idea of the music of the spheres, through Scipio and Macrobius, inhabits the end of *The Merchant of Venice* (5.1.54–88). The selfsame tune may not represent our idea of celestial sounds, but it is full of poetic music.

The celestial music, of course, is integral to Pythagoras's founding belief that numbers express the principles or laws of the universe and the souls of men.[38] Platonists were impressed by number too; being more formal, more like Plato's Forms, number was believed closer to ultimate reality than physical data; in the *Timaeus*, number determines the shape and order of creation. The idea that numbers were the reality behind or within the cosmos was the basic principle of numerologists from the Gnostics and Cabalists to the Renaissance, where Platonists, occultists, and poets continued to reflect the view. It is likely, then, that Shakespeare knew something of this belief and that the witches' tune in *Macbeth* is a reflection of the *musica mundana*, the numbers of time. Indeed, Shakespeare may have been thinking of St. Augustine's reprise of the *Book of Wisdom* in *The City of God*—"Thou hast ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight"—when he wrote Malcolm's final speech.[39]

By the time of the Renaissance, of course, numerological systems were very complicated and self-contradictory; many meanings for many numbers made systematic claims impossible.[40] But almost all systems shared certain key numbers: 1 through 10 and some of their multiples. Concerning the cosmos, the important numbers were 2, 3, and 4. These derive from the well-known Pythagorean *tetraktys*, or tetrad, believed to be the archetypal foundation of the universe. One, the monad, a point identified with God, extends itself to a universe of 2, the dyad, a line that divides all into contraries (light/darkness, good/evil, male/female, etc.) and 3, the triad, a two-dimensional surface area that sup-

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[38] My discussion of numerology is indebted to Vincent F. Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism* (1938; New York, Cooper Square, 1969); Christopher Butler, *Number Symbolism* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970); S. K. Heninger, Jr., *Touches of Sweet Harmony: Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Politics* (San Marino, CA: The Huntington Library, 1974); and John MacQueen, *Numerology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985); as well as to Fowler and Shumaker as cited in nn. 34 and 30 above.

[39] Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke, trans. Gerald G. Walsh, Demetrius B. Zema, Grace Monahan, and Daniel J. Honan (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1958), 11.30, and also quoted in Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism*, 75, and Butler, *Number Symbolism*, 24–25.

[40] See Butler, *Number Symbolism*, 51–61.

posedly reconciles the opposites. Two and 3 represent in themselves the famous cosmological principle of *discordia concors*, a harmony of conflicting opposites. Taken together, moreover, 2 and 3 are the harmonic middle that yokes the spiritual (1) with the material (4) in the cosmos. Four, the tetrad, a geometrical solid expressing volume, is an appropriate number for matter. It is consistent with the four elements of the cosmos and the timing of physical change on earth: the four seasons.

Adding these numbers up yields the Pythagorean perfection of 10, the decad, suggesting that the universe, one turned into many, or God's created world, is harmonious. Pythagoras assumed this harmony in his description of the diapasons of music, of which the numbers 1 through 4 were the foundational tuning system. This *musica humana* was, of course, a reflection of the music of the spheres, cosmic lubricant for the Ptolemaic geocentric spheres which were presumed to be in perpetual motion. Likewise, the tetrad was applied to man as microcosm (e.g., child, youth, adult, elder) and later to man's soul (e.g., the four humors). Finally, for the Pythagoreans, man's creations were evidence of his essence as number: mimetic art was "a persuasive demonstration that our lives are patterned according to number, weight, and measure—according to the same dimensions as the universe."[41] Therefore, despite growing empiricism and skepticism toward medieval cosmology in the early modern era, Shakespeare may have been alluding in the witches' selfsame tune to the ancient but still extant universal connections of Pythagorean numerology.

Beyond the symbolic possibilities found in stylistic repetition alone, then, the numbers of repetitions (doublings, triplings, and quadruplings) in the largely tetrameter lines of the witches and elsewhere may bring a mysterious cosmic dimension to the tragedy of *Macbeth*. As noted above, Pythagorean lore considered 2 and 3 the numbers by which the supernatural inhabited the material. But even more specific numerological associations are possible as well. The Renaissance found more than cosmological significance in 2 and 3, though complication and inconsistency prevent a precise reading. Two, for example, is usually considered a negative number but also has many positive and neutral associations. Cornelius Agrippa claims that two "signifies knowledge, memory, light, man (the microcosm), charity, wedding, and society," and he also notes that there were two testaments, two tables of law, two first parents, two large planets (moon and sun), and two ratio-

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[41] Heninger, *Sweet Harmony*, 194.

nal creatures (angels and humans), among other dyads.[42] In general, however, 2 is associated less positively; as noted above, its symbolic essence is division, an evil, since 2 prevents the perfect unity of 1, the divine. Thus, Agrippa also includes as equivalences man's capacity to choose evil instead of good, the two sexes, "discord and confusion (division again), misfortune, impurity, and matter."[43] This is how Spenser sees things in book 1 of *The Faerie Queene*: Duessa, who is grossly physical, duplicitous, and discordant, is contrasted to the true faith, Una. Two is, essentially, the number of the lower, non-divine part of standard human pairings: the body as opposed to the soul, the willful imagination versus reason, and the female sex (often held incapable of reason).

Three, on the other hand, is usually associated more positively. First, as noted earlier, there are the number's obvious trinitarian overtones and use as diabolic parody. But equally important is the number's status in the classical tradition; as noted above, 3 unites what 2 divides, brings 1 (spirit) and 2 (matter) together, and thus is the number of harmony, of marriage (generative love), of the world perfected, and of the masculine (both passionate and rational) gender. Alistair Fowler describes the triad as the highest human and earthly perfection possible and relates the number to the Garden of Adonis in book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*.[44]

However clouded by implicit ambiguities and vaguities, then, these numerological associations suggest what several in Shakespeare's audience may have understood about the pervasive, repetitive dyadic and triadic verbal structures analyzed in this essay. First, the fact that the pattern involves two numbers which are, in a sense, symbolic opposites, not to mention the fact that one of them is the number of division and confusion, reinforces the ambiguity of the play. Conversely, the fact that the verse repeats, for the most part, two numerical patterns (disregarding the much less numerous fourfold patterns or considering them doublings of twofold ones), coupled with the fact that one of those two patterns usually represents divinity and a beneficent force which contains the discordant other, suggests that however ambiguous the world of the play, an invisible order still operates. The selfsame tune implies, then, both actual cosmic discord and potential harmony, or suggests that the fatal or providential forces operative in the cosmos include both divisive and harmonic power. (Of course, the presence of these powers is suggested to us without cognitive certainty, without being simplisti-

[42] Shumaker, *Occult Sciences*, 138.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Fowler, *Numbers of Time*, 18–23.

cally untrue to life, in which the divine is only mysteriously intimated if at all. Shakespeare holds the mirror up to nature in more than one sense here.) Most importantly, the numbers chosen for adumbration are numerologically appropriate to basic issues in *Macbeth*: cosmic, natural, and social discord or harmony, sex and marriage, and the relationship of imagination and reason, among others.

As speech, of course, the witches' tune also reflects division in the souls of its speakers; given the analogical perspectives possible in the Renaissance, one would expect this microcosmic split to accompany macrocosmic discord. In this regard, it is especially suggestive to think in terms of medieval and Renaissance faculty psychology, since the structure of man's soul in most versions of that scheme is so obviously triadic and dyadic. The soul is held to be tripartite, as in Plato, while each of the higher parts (the sensitive and the intellectual) is split into two powers (apprehension and motion), themselves divisible into three parts (e.g., the apprehending part of the sensitive soul has three internal senses, and the same part of the intellectual soul includes intellect, reason, and understanding).[45] Thus in *Macbeth* when the incantatory and regressive patterns, often mixed with equivocal, ambiguous signification, appear in the minds of the hero and heroine, a divisive imbalance in the faculty psychology of both may be implied. In the Macbeths, the masculine and feminine are not harmonized, a divisive rather than generative path to the crown is chosen, and the lesser imaginative and willful faculties in each "Outrun the pauser, reason" (2.3.109), which should rule. The most obvious instances of the witches' tune in the mouths of various characters, moreover, come in times of private agitation, when the imagination, that faculty so tricky yet so capable of strange constancy (*A Midsummer Night's Dream* 5.1.1–27), is relatively unfettered by reason. The imagination, of course, was held to be the avenue by which the devil and the witches attacked their prey.[46] In con-

[45] Faculty psychology is a hodgepodge of slightly different constructions, but its Aristotelian and ultimately Thomist fundamentals can be discerned in such texts as Bright's *Treatise on Melancholy* (1586), Davies's *Nosce Teipsum* (1599), the English translation of Primaudaye's *The French Academy* (1600), and Wright's *The Passions of the minde in general* (1604). See Ruth L. Anderson, *Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays*, University of Iowa Studies 3.4 (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1927); and E. Ruth Harvey, *The Inward Wits: Psychological Theory in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, 1975).

[46] K. Tetzeli von Rosador, "'Supernatural soliciting': Temptation and Imagination in *Dr. Faustus* and *Macbeth*," in *Shakespeare and His Contemporaries: Essays in Comparison*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 42–59, suggests that Renaissance witches are agents of cosmic conflict who operate by distorting their vic-

clusion, I note that the largest repositories of the selfsame tune—Macbeth's and his wife's soliloquies, the Porter's inebriated remarks, and Lady Macbeth's sleep-talking—are in part manifestations of the characters' imaginations. Moreover, they have as little indebtedness to Shakespeare's known sources as any lines in the play: they are all inventions of the dramatist himself.

While numerological criticism must remain largely speculative, especially in drama, where unlike in poetry, the conviction of an argument based on ingenious and exact line counting (as in Spenser's *Epithalamion*) is impossible, the heavy repetition that the basic numbers receive and the appropriate connections they have to the themes, characters, and atmosphere of this play make it difficult to dismiss numerology as a signifier in *Macbeth*. This is especially the case because the architecture of the text and the historical context of its writing also support the play's repeated stylistic forms. First, the characters seem to be grouped appropriately; *Macbeth* is full of families of two and three. Though other plays share this feature (such as *King Lear* and the romantic comedies), audiences may notice the groups more in *Macbeth*. Simon Forman, the astrologer, alchemist, and inveterate playgoer, calls attention in his *Book of Plaies and Notes* to the fact that "2 noblemen" meet "3 women feiries" who hail him "3 tymes" in the opening of the Globe's 1611 production.[47] Furthermore, at least one modern critic has shown that the structure of the play is dyadic and triadic.[48] Indeed, dramatic actions are frequently repeated according to the pattern. For example, Macbeth's meeting with the witches is fully described three times: once dramatically, once in a letter, and once in conversation. Or the opening battle is won twice in the field and a third time at Cawdor's death.[49] Or Rosse tells Macduff about his wife twice, and the latter's grief is expressed in three apparently disbelieving questions.[50] Or Macbeth is defeated in action by two noble sons (Malcolm and Macduff) and in lineage by a third (Fleance). Additionally, the play offers strange twosomes and threesomes, like the waiting woman and doctor who watch Lady

tims' imagistic perceptions. My analysis suggests that the witches do not thrive by images alone.

[47] Forman, quoted in Muir's introduction to *Macbeth*, xiii–xiv.

[48] D. F. Rauber, "Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth," *Criticism* 11 (1969): 59–67.

[49] See Harry Berger, Jr., "The Early Scenes in *Macbeth*: Preface to a New Interpretation," *ELH* 47 (1980): 17.

[50] This quizzical double disclosure (first a lie, then a terrible truth about the murder of Lady Macduff and her children) was brought to my attention by Professor Joyce East of West Virginia State College.

Macbeth sleepwalk, or (in language only) the "two or three" (4.1.141) Lenox says reported Macduff's flight to England. Finally, there are the two, then inexplicably three murderers, who meet Macbeth on stage for a second and third time, who are not numbered by Holinshed but who have no identity except number in Shakespeare. Perhaps, then, it is the number, not the identity, of the third murderer that Shakespeare wanted to emphasize, purposely leaving the name a mystery.

Beyond the text, we must think of James I. As previously noted, *Macbeth* may have been written for a first performance before the king. At the very least, it contains matters of some interest to the monarch: the witchcraft issue on which he wrote, questions of political usurpation and divine intervention in royal affairs, the "equivocation" material relating to the recent plot on his life, the presentation of an analogous earlier moment of unity between England and Scotland, and parallels to the so-called Gowrie conspiracy against James in the late sixteenth century. Kernan thinks that James may have set up the Gowries with a false story as part of a family revenge; the king clearly made political hay by celebrating its anniversary as Gowrie Day.[51] Whether the story was mythical or not, however, the "murder of Duncan by Macbeth is presented in such a way as to evoke profound memory of the near murder of James by the Gowries. James' deliverance was acutely significant, indeed providentially confirming, because it represented the king's second escape—and very possibly even his third escape—from the treacherous designs of the House of Gowrie."[52] Interestingly as well, some contemporaries believed that the earl of Gowrie was a cabalist and associate of necromancers.[53]

The clearest link between *Macbeth* and Shakespeare's royal patron, however, is the Stuart genealogy represented by the show of Banquo and the eight kings (eight or nine figures, triple and double multiples respectively of 2 and 3) during Macbeth's last meeting with the witches. During this show, Shakespeare has Macbeth react with horror not only to a mirror picturing generations beyond the last king, but also to the "two-fold balls and treble sceptres" (4.1.121) some of those future monarchs carry. Within the drama, these symbols of royalty and sexual potency help stir Macbeth to revenge his impotence, his "barren sceptre" (3.1.60–63), by the murder of Macduff's wife and children. In addi-

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[51] Kernan, *King's Playwright*, 40–41 and 60.

[52] Stanley Kozikowski, "The Gowrie Conspiracy against James VI: A New Source for Shakespeare's *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Studies* 13 (1980): 206.

[53] Ibid., 202.

tion, the balls and scepters might also have been symbolic outside the drama. Many in the Jacobean audience might have seen a direct reference to James and his several coronations. The twofold balls may have reminded the audience of orbs symbolic of James's double coronation (England and Scotland), while the treble scepters may have been interpreted as the two staffs used for investment in the English coronation at Westminster and the one staff used at Scone.[54] Alternatively, the balls may represent the unity of the crowns of Scotland and England, while the scepters represent the union, in theory, of England, France, and Ireland under James.[55] In either case, the reference, and by implication the verbal patterns of the same number, relate to the reigning monarch, perhaps reinforcing the mysterious providential identification which the verbal pattern possesses. Both in Shakespeare's play and in the minds of its first audiences, then, the selfsame tune of repetitive doubles and triples may intimate the existence of universal design amid cosmic, political, and psychological chaos.

IV

Both late New Critical and postmodern analyses of *Macbeth* have, in the last two decades, considerably altered how scholars of the early modern era understand the play. From A. C. Bradley on, humanist and formalist critics writing in the first sixty years of the twentieth century generally saw the tragedy as a relatively clear and simple study of the human capacity for and retributive consequences of moral evil. Macbeth and his wife, though influenced by the witches' prophecies, voluntarily choose to commit an immoral and criminal act for which they justly, though not unsympathetically, pay a psychological and political price.[56] Several historical critics, then and now, have buttressed this in-

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[54] See Muir's note to 4.1.121 in his edition of *Macbeth*.

[55] E. B. Lyle, "The 'Twofold Balls and Treble Scepters' in *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28 (1977): 516–19, whose interpretation is based on panegyrics to James in Gwinn's *Tres Sibyllae* and George Buc's *Daphnis Polystephanos*.

[56] See A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904; New York: Fawcett, 1966); D. A. Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare* (1938; Garden City: Doubleday, 1969); Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Invention of Man* (1942; New York: Macmillan, 1961); Roy Walker, *The Time is Free: A Study of Macbeth* (London: Dakers, 1949); G. R. Elliott, *Dramatic Providence in "Macbeth"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958); Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951); L. C. Knights, *Some Shakespearean Themes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959); and Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*. The obvious exception is G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire* (1930; London: Methuen, 1962).

terpretation by making the case that Shakespeare wrote the play in support of the king and his policies.[57] To the contrary, relatively recent formalist and historicist studies have argued for increased recognition of the play's ambiguity and complexity.[58] Furthermore, what earlier critics saw in the last acts of *Macbeth* as a progressive cleansing of Scotland by its victimized good sons, Malcolm and Macduff, has more recently been interpreted as a cyclical return of violent, patriarchal, and oppressive figures who are not likely to be any better than Macbeth.[59] The cause of strife, that is, may be found in the political hierarchy and patriarchal culture of Scotland.[60] Indeed, several leading critics claim that the witches are heroines who successfully subvert a pack of male oppressors.[61] While a few recent scholars incorporate but ultimately reject

[57] See Paul, *Royal Play*; Wills, *Witches and Jesuits*; Kernan, *King's Playwright*; and George Walton Williams, "*Macbeth*: King James's Play," *South Atlantic Review* 47.2 (1982): 12–21.

[58] The formalists include Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), who emphasizes the irreducibility of truth, especially with respect to the hero's motivation; and Stephen Booth, *"King Lear," "Macbeth," Indefinition, and Tragedy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), who argues that indefinition in the play is barely contained by its tragic form. The New Historicists include Michael Hawkins, "History, Politics, and *Macbeth*," in *Focus on "Macbeth,"* ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 155–88; and Stephen Mullaney, "Lying Like Truth: Riddle, Representation, and Treason in Renaissance England" *ELH* 47 (1980): 32–47, who points out the "amphibology" (ambiguity) of treasonous discourse in early modern England.

[59] Another formalist, Berger, "Early Scenes," contends that the shape of the play is ironic, that Cawdor, Macbeth, Macduff, and Malcolm are all rebels and/or regicides, and that the early scenes suggest how competitive warrior values assumed by all the characters render unsatisfactory simple moral distinctions between them. Moreover, Booth, *"King Lear,"* believes that Shakespeare manipulates theatrical experience to work against an audience's acceptance of the so-called good characters in *Macbeth*. Foster, "War on Time," thinks Malcolm and Macduff are clearly part of a cycle of repeated revenge and disorder. Jonathan Goldberg, "*Macbeth* and Source," in *Poststructuralist Readings of English Poetry*, ed. Richard Machen and Christopher Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 38–58, arguing from deconstructive principles about the limited hegemony of dominant discourses, says Shakespeare did not make his characters overtly good or evil; Malcolm and Macduff resemble Macbeth more than they differ from him. Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays* (London: Routledge, 1992), attributes the cause of all inhumanity and destruction in *Macbeth* to the play's absolutist fantasy of escape from female origins and power, a patriarchal wish of which Macbeth is the exemplar but to which Malcolm and Macduff are ambiguously or tangentially related.

[60] Karen S. Coddon, "'Unreal Mockery': Unreason and the Problem of Spectacle in *Macbeth*," *ELH* 56 (1989): 485–501, in a New Historical postmodern analysis, goes even further by suggesting that Macbeth should not be considered an individual person but, rather, the product of a social disorder reflective of the precarious political foundations of Jacobean England.

[61] Goldberg, "*Macbeth* and Source," says the witches represent the "heterogeneity of uncontrolled duplication" and successfully subvert fantasies of dominance in the "hyper-

these postmodernist trends, and while both the underpinnings and the appropriateness of recent critical judgments about Renaissance literature have been heatedly challenged, the new readings dominate critical discourse on *Macbeth* today.[62]

In this critical context, what the selfsame tune of supernatural soliciting suggests is that *Macbeth* presents us with a paradoxical world that is both demonically cyclical and progressively orthodox in its design. The play is neither a simple expression of crime and punishment reflective of James's (or Tillyard's) biases nor a play as ambiguously dark and nihilistic as *King Lear*. Rather, the repetitive (possibly numerological) verbal patterns in *Macbeth* represent, in such a manner that divine will always remains a mystery, the existence of a supernatural order in which possible but indeterminate providential designs work through demonic and human actors to bring changes to the history of Scotland and England.[63] Likewise, while there are no outright heroes in the bellicose society of the play, and almost all characters, largely blind to the patriarchal ideology and the cycle of revenge they enact, bear some responsibility for the bloody gore in Scotland, yet those who oppose the Macbeths are still distinguishable as better characters—morally, psychologically, and politically.[64] Therefore, while the inscrutable and subversively cyclical forces so dear to recent criticism are clearly inscribed in the verbal patterns I have analyzed, the repetitive style in

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masculine world" of the play. Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), believes the witches are culturally marginalized heroines who expose the foulness of an oppressive social hierarchy that blindly considers itself fair and just.

[62] See Arthur Kirsch, "Macbeth's Suicide," *ELH* 51 (1984): 269–96; and Robert Reid, "Macbeth's Three Murders: Shakespearean Psychology and Tragic Form," *Renaissance Papers* (1991): 75–92, for essays that incorporate but ultimately reject recent critical claims. See Graham Bradshaw, *Misrepresentations: Shakespeare and the Materialists* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993); John M. Ellis, *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); and Brian Vickers, *Appropriating Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), for attacks on contemporary literary theory and some of its Renaissance applications.

[63] See Robin Grove, " 'Multiplying villainies of nature,' " in *Focus on "Macbeth,"* ed. John Russell Brown (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 113–39, who thinks that nature in *Macbeth* is equivocal; and John Stachniewski, "Calvinist Psychology in *Macbeth*," *Shakespeare Studies* 20 (1988): 169–89, who thinks that Calvinist predestination is the providential force that works in the psyche of Macbeth throughout the play.

[64] See James L. Calderwood, *If It Were Done: "Macbeth" and Tragic Action* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1986), for a balanced view of the play. Calderwood believes that the structure of *Macbeth* is both progressively linear and cyclical, sees in its repetitions both barren augmentation and procreative increase, and finds that negative judgments of Malcolm and Macduff, while serious, do not obliterate the rightness of their actions at the end.

Macbeth also strongly suggests the existence of some kind of fated progressive order beyond the fog and filthy air. Indeed, the selfsame tune shows how deeply embedded in the text of the play is the universal "chaosmos," the *discordia concors* of destructive repetition and providential creation. In *Macbeth*, there are furious sounds that signify something, a vision paradoxically diabolical and divine.[65]

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[65] Without a sense of the full power of the ambiguous cosmological forces represented in the "selfsame tune" of witches and Scots, in conjunction of course with an understanding of the hero's violent warrior values, patriarchal insecurities, and individual psychological idiosyncracy, audiences are unlikely to identify with or feel pity for Macbeth, thus forestalling the kind of catharsis that Shakespeare's other great tragedies inspire. I believe that these paradoxical universal forces are part of the *hamartia* of the play; they must be felt in the poetry, or Macbeth's tragic plight will not be fully experienced. Perhaps rhetorical and linguistic insensitivity on the part of contemporary directors, actors, and audiences is the reason why, as Professor Lois Potter of the University of Delaware recently told me, productions of *Macbeth* seldom, if ever, achieve the tragic feeling of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*.