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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE BLACK KING:  
GIRARDIAN THOUGHT IN THE TRAGEDY OF *MACBETH*

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Bachelor of Arts in English

Baldwin-Wallace College

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submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree

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**We hereby approve this thesis**

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**for the Department of**

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THE RISE AND FALL OF THE BLACK KING:  
GIRARDIAN THOUGHT IN THE TRAGEDY OF *MACBETH*

MATTHEW TARNOVECKY

**ABSTRACT**

Theorist René Girard, in his *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare* (1991), creates a near-perfect compendium of his critical thoughts by exploring numerous plays and poems of Shakespeare's. Curiously, however, the tragedy of *Macbeth* is left out of Girard's many thorough analyses. Herein discussed is an analysis of *Macbeth* utilizing the Girardian model, intending to demonstrate that Shakespeare's Scottish tragedy may benefit from such a reading as equally as the plays and poems Girard himself has already examined. By drawing upon the concepts generated by Girard in his *Violence and the Sacred* (1972), one may note how *Macbeth* is filled with the mimetic rivalries, crises of degree, and instances of undifferentiation that serve to propel Shakespeare's Scotland into the throes of chaos. Such chaos is ultimately what constitutes both the rise and the fall of Macbeth, following a twisted course of events tainted with the blood and violence of sacrifice.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
CHAPTER I.....	1
CHAPTER II.....	9
CHAPTER III.....	25
CHAPTER IV.....	42
CHAPTER V.....	55
WORKS CITED.....	57

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction: A History of Girardian Thought

In 1972, René Girard published his resoundingly critical *Violence and the Sacred*. Within that text, Girard laid the precepts of what would become a working theoretical model through which he and other scholars like him might deconstruct, investigate, and affix concepts such as sacrifice, mimetic desire, and religious crisis to innumerable other texts. Yet the value of *Violence and the Sacred* encompasses more than its ability to serve as a foundation for Girard's sacrificial model. Fortuitously, Girard himself chose to design that model in no small part by means of relying on famous myths already present in the greater discourse of literary scrutiny; myths such as those surrounding the inconstant figure of Dionysus or the tragic figure of Oedipus. Such myths are extremely important not only to Girard, who uses them as the catalysts for his thoughts, but also to any scholar who wishes to expand upon what Girard has begun, for by studying Girard's ideas that scholar knows how to reproduce them within a text of his own choosing.

It is perhaps ironic, then, that so few scholars have chosen to capitalize on the power Girard infused into the scholarly world after *Violence and the Sacred* was published, especially in regard to how the Girardian model may be utilized in the various works of

Shakespeare. While a handful of scholars such as Elizabeth Rivlin, Alan Hager, David K. Anderson, and Laurie Osborne have seen fit to explore only select plays with Girardian thought as their base, far too many Shakespearean scholars have not at all shown interest in expanding Girard's work into any plays. Indeed, it is hardly a conceit to acknowledge that it is Girard himself who has accomplished the greatest strides relating to reinforcing his theory into the realm of Shakespeare's work, particularly due to his 1991 publication *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare*. Almost as seminal in value as *Violence and the Sacred* all but two decades before it, *A Theatre of Envy* may be realistically considered Girard's primary outlet for his sacrificial model into the discourse of Shakespeare studies. By exploring over thirteen distinct plays, as well as commentating on various sonnets and the famous narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*, Girard has created in *A Theatre of Envy* a near-perfect compendium of his ideas as they relate to Shakespeare's works.

Curiously, however, for as many famous works of Shakespeare's that *A Theatre of Envy* does explore, it seems to entirely ignore others. Of particular consequence to all future arguments which will herein be explored is one play above any other: the tragedy of *Macbeth*. Rife with the necessary makings for a Girardian interpretation, *Macbeth* is an impeccable example of the dangers and consequences which sacrifice, mimetic desire, and religious crisis may unfold into without the proper social control that so many literary theories outside of Girard's own take for granted; and more importantly, *Macbeth* has been wholly ignored by Girard and other scholars who would capitalize upon his work alike. Yet in spite of that lack of interest from the Girardian community, *Macbeth* itself can scarcely be described as being disregarded in recent years by the greater academic community. Since *Violence and the Sacred* was published in 1972, there have been over

six-hundred journal articles published featuring *Macbeth* as their focus. Such articles have varied widely in regard to scope and content, but they have nevertheless been embodied by a decently noticeable set of a few recurring and popular trends.

In the past decade alone, the ever-dubious relationship between the mind and the body, in specific regard to one's passions and humors, has been a domineering interest in a variety of literary journals. Sandra Clark's "Macbeth and the Language of the Passions" (2012), Ying-chiao Lin's "Every Noise Appals Me': Macbeth's Plagued Ear" (2013), and Suparna Roychoudhury's "Melancholy, Ecstasy, Phantasma: The Pathologies of *Macbeth*" (2013) are but three such articles concerned with that topic. By utilizing the natural senses and the maladies which might affect them, Clark, Lin, and Roychoudhury detail the dangers and consequences of emotional stress and melancholic behavior in the play. More so than that, the work of those scholars at least ostensibly appears to be guiding *Macbeth* into a series of discourses which reintroduce it to the philosophies and critical theories of the natural sciences. Clark in particular may be viewed as contributing to such an effort insomuch as she heavily calls upon the Cartesian Dualism and other theories of the mind designed by René Descartes long before the emergence of philosophies and critical theories made popular over the past sixty years.

More unconventional work published within the past decade has centered around a series of fascinating endeavors to draw comparisons between *Macbeth* and other famous works of English literature, such as Serdar Öztürk's "Two Notorious Villains in Two Famous Literary Works: Satan in *Paradise Lost* and Machbeth in *Macbeth*" (2009) and Earl Showerman's "Shakespeare's Greater Greek: Macbeth and Aeschylus' Oresteia" (2011). By drawing intricate comparisons between plot, dramatic structure, and characters,



Öztürk and Showerman have sought to include *Macbeth* in the greater range of literary discourses. Öztürk's work in particular is an enthralling jaunt into the realm of character study, as his assessment of Shakespeare's portrayal of Macbeth and Milton's charismatic yet utterly twisted portrayal of Satan in *Paradise Lost* is only the first of two instances following Rachel Trubowitz's "The Single State of Man': Androgyny in *Macbeth* and *Paradise Lost*" (1990) that such famous pieces of literature and their characters have been brought together in the past few decades.

Yet surprisingly enough, the trend that has continuously appeared throughout publication over the past decade offers little in the way of pure literary study. Rather, what has been the reoccurring topic of interest for many scholars is an in-depth study of *Macbeth* through the lens of the play's many theatrical and film adaptations. Such articles as Paul Edmondson's "*Macbeth*: The Play in Performance" (2005), Kristin Noone's "Shakespeare in Discworld: Witches, Fantasy, and Desire" (2010), and Jeff W. Marker's "Orson Welles's *Macbeth*: Allegory and Anticommunism" (2013) constitute but the smallest body of available pieces relating to the subject of *Macbeth* and the performing arts. Regardless, in spite of the sheer number of articles pertaining to that topic, it seems unlikely that work of Edmondson, Noone, Marker, and their peers will ever establish a dominate position as the premier theme of *Macbeth* studies due to the inherent favor bequeathed to articles that choose to reflect themes of a more intrinsically literary nature.

Ultimately, the only common trend which exists to link all the scholarship published on *Macbeth* after 1972 is the inexhaustible refusal to admit Girard's work into the ever-evolving discourse on the play. Truly, such a trend is a terribly unfortunate and injudicious oversight; and yet it is also nevertheless a distinct opportunity to usher *Macbeth*

into a place it has never before been. By introducing Girard's work to *Macbeth*, what shall be created for the first time is a brand new and unique sensibility through which to view the play. Indeed, all that shall be further proposed herein is new, and perhaps sometimes seemingly radical, but shall nevertheless focus on drawing Girard's theory into *Macbeth*, a play that has already been shown to have a venerable and eclectic pedigree of study. As such, consequently, while *A Theatre of Envy* remains pivotal to Girard's work on both historical and bibliographic levels, it is at this point that its usefulness entirely gives way to Girard's original precepts in *Violence and the Sacred*. With no personal commentary on *Macbeth* of which to speak within *A Theatre of Envy*, there is no further reason to utilize it. There is, however, a more pragmatic need to briefly reflect upon the work of scholars such as Rivlin, Hager, Anderson, and Osborne, who have all seen fit to explore other Shakespeare plays through a Girardian lens by calling upon Girard's insights. So too shall the exploration of *Macbeth* herein call upon their own insights in order to help contextualize Girard's ideas, and thus will the relationship between all ideas, whether from Girard himself or others, be far more easily understood within *Macbeth*.

Elizabeth Rivlin, in her essay "Mimetic Service in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*," offers a complimentary explanation to the dynamic at work in the relationship shared between a servant and a master. According to Rivlin, the chain that binds servant and master is forged by links of imitation which ultimately serve to distort the unique identity of one from the other. As she states, "the servant acts as his master's proxy, an iterative function, but one that allows him to exploit the space between will and its fruition. The imitative relationship of servant and master is thus informed by difference as well as similitude" (Rivlin 105). In other words, any differentiation between a master's will and a

servant's own desire shall eventually become too blurry due to the repetitive nature of their bond. For Rivlin, then, such blurring of the distinct identities between servant and master, and thus the desires of both parties, leads to a fundamental collapse of not only the servant/master system but the inherent stability that system comprises. With such stability no longer in place, the desires which blur servant and master give way to the particular rivalry which sets them apart as enemies. Such thinking must be well met, not only due to its own laurels as a fine argument, but because Rivlin appropriately notes how the interchange between desire and rivalry comes directly from Girard. Within Girardian mimesis, "rivalry derives not from difference but from the similitude of desire, a similitude that threatens to eradicate distinct identities" (114).

Alan Hager, in his article "'The Teeth of Emulation': Failed Sacrifice in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*," speculates that sacrifice in Shakespeare's Roman tragedy is by no means a word that may be attributed to but one or two of the play's characters. Rather, Hager identifies human sacrifice "on everyone's lips in [the] play" (Hager 54), to the degree that any "discussion and representation of ritual destruction of humans to appease the gods...pervade the drama to such an extent as to create a problem in the interpretation of the play" (54). Similarly, David K. Anderson, in his article "The Tragedy of Good Friday: Sacrificial Violence in *King Lear*," speculates that the particular acts of violence within *King Lear* represent Shakespeare's exploitation of "a division within the religious culture of Jacobean England, where increasingly acts of sacrificial violence were challenging witnesses with an interpretive problem" (Anderson 260). Such an interpretive problem, Anderson argues, reveals how "persecutory violence was the point at which the English church confronted itself, and the often-wide gap between its ideals and its

practices” (260). What both Hager and Anderson offer in their arguments is more than just insight into the discourse of religious study; the true significance of their arguments is actually found in what they have inadvertently revealed about how Shakespeare’s characters interact with religious bodies. Whether it be a pantheon of fickle deities or the duplicitous teachings of an equally duplicitous church, the characters of Shakespeare’s plays are manacled beneath some supernatural force in such a way that the force always exerts a degree of control over them.

Laurie Osborne, in her article “*Crisis of Degree* in Shakespeare’s *Henriad*,” offers credible assistance in rendering the Girardian concept of *undifferentiation* and its closely associated concept of crisis of degree as two separable parts of the same whole. In spite of Osborne’s focus on the effects of crisis as they occur in the *Henry* plays, she nonetheless observes that “according to Girard’s interpretation of myth, out of the original state of No Difference, man established Difference through sacred violence” (Osborne 337). Not only is the undifferentiated “original state” the model from which a society will seek differentiation, it is also the source of the beneficent sacrificial rites which will maintain a society’s harmony and equilibrium once differentiation is found. Osborne further observes that “when these rites fall into disuse, the safeguards against the violent and chaotic state of No Difference fail; the society *then* suffers a crisis of Degree as all differences appear to vanish” (337 emphasis added). The point is clear. It is only after the differentiation of social categories reverts to a state of undifferentiation due to a society’s failure to maintain sacrificial rites that destructive violence and the crisis of degree will occur. Correspondingly, of what little Girard does allude to in regard to the validity of that notion, it is imperative to note that he argues “it is not the differences but the loss of them that

gives rise to violence and chaos” (Girard 51). Such violence “succeeds in destroying [more] distinctions, and this destruction in turn fuels the renewed violence” (49). Like the unfurling of a historical carpet, undifferentiation and the crisis of degree follow one another as a society arises, matures, and either saves itself or destroys itself based on its ability to recognize differentiation. Since *Macbeth* has neither a past history nor a future history, since all there is to Shakespeare’s fictional Scotland is between Act 1 and Act 5, then the role of undifferentiation as the progenitor of the sacrificial problem and the role of the crisis of degree as its bloody effect is evident.

## CHAPTER II

### The Art of Sacrifice: A Comprehensive Presentation of Mimesis

As the first two scenes of *Macbeth* unfurl, one is treated to a fragmented history quite already in progress. High upon a heath, the androgynous witches of the play riddle in affairs of black fortune and a battle underway, as not one but rather two of King Duncan's subjects have brought rebellion to his kingdom, and "brave Macbeth" (*Macbeth* 1.2.16) has been sent to dispatch one such traitor. Of the two defectors from the Scottish crown, it is the latter, the Thane of Cawdor, who at present is of greater significance. That man, as thane, bears a particular type of subservient responsibility to the king, more clearly understood as the dynamic between a submissive servant to his dominant master, which he has forsaken in a bid for power, and which consequently conveys him no reward but his swift and just execution. In Act 1, Scene 2, Duncan commands Cawdor's death sentence without compassion or reluctance, declaring how "No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive / Our bosom interest. Go pronounce his present death, / And with his former title greet Macbeth" (1.2.63-65). Such a phrase as "bosom interest" in the King's language is far more particular than it at first appears, and indeed serves as the foundation for what Girard describes in *Violence and the Sacred* as an invitation to the mode of sacrifice. As

Girard argues, “A human being dies, and the solidarity of the survivors is enhanced by his death” (Girard 255); but what Girard could equally argue to the same effect is that “a servant dies, and the community of which that servant is a part is enhanced by his death.” The interplay between the individual and the state, or more appropriately between the servant and the master, serves as a Girardian exemplar that not only suffices in its ability to draw the discourse of sacrifice into Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, but that does so by utilizing the Thane of Cawdor’s execution as a most revealing gateway. For one such as Cawdor, a servant who rebels against his master, the King, the erosion of distinctive identities and desires has already given rise to mimetic rivalry.

In spite of Rivlin’s excellent interpretation of the servant/master system as it may apply to Girard’s model of mimesis, there remains an element of sacrifice within the model that Rivlin neglects to explore. That element is the nature of the resolution between mimetic rivals. According to Girard, “all sacrificial rites are based on two substitutions. The first is provided by generative violence, which substitutes a single victim for all the members of the community. The second, the only strictly ritualistic substitution, is that of a victim for the surrogate victim” (269). In context, whereas Rivlin would argue that any servant partaking of a mimetic rivalry may end the rivalry of his own volition due to the ability of “servants to rearrange social identities” (106) at will, Girard’s model contends that the “damage” is already done at the point rivalry is established. Cawdor, unlike Rivlin’s servants, cannot undo what he has done; his crime of rebellion, his status as a traitor, both caused by his mimetic rivalry with Duncan, must reach a resolution that is based in sacrifice rather than a second shifting of mimetic desire leading to a new unique identity. So it is interesting to note, then, how the resolution of the rivalry between Cawdor and Duncan is

informed by both sacrificial substitutions as Girard describes them. First, as it is indeed Cawdor who is executed between the void in Act 1, Scene 2 where he is sentenced and Act 1, Scene 4 where his execution is recounted by Malcolm, it is clear that Cawdor is chosen as the “single victim for all the members of the community;” second, that Cawdor is not substituted in death by a surrogate victim serves a Girardian purpose that recurs in the play until Malcolm’s rise to the throne in the final Scene. By sentencing Cawdor himself to death for inciting rebellion rather than selecting a surrogate victim in his stead, Duncan ensures the solidarity of his remaining subjects is maintained and the dissolution of identity which blurs him with Cawdor will end. Further, Duncan teaches his remaining thanes a potent lesson: rebellion shall not be tolerated.

Unfortunately, Duncan’s lesson is learned by Macbeth all too well much to the later terror of the people under Macbeth’s tyrannical rule. Regardless, by substituting open rebellion for clandestine murder, Macbeth, it must be argued, is far more capable in his role as Duncan’s mimetic rival than Cawdor is; yet Macbeth, who gains what Cawdor does not, nevertheless equally meets Cawdor’s grisly end. More importantly, the ultimate fate of Macbeth, just like the fate of Cawdor, serves the same purpose of restoring harmony and order to Scotland. In order to fully comprehend how the transition from harmony, to chaos, and then back to harmony is situated in *Macbeth*, a comprehensive examination of the sacrifices that take place over the play’s five Acts is most prudent. Moving beyond the treachery of Cawdor, it is thus sensible to take note of Macbeth’s first meeting with the witches, for it is during that meeting that his mimetic desire for Duncan’s throne is originally made manifest.



In Act 1, Scene 3, the source language of Macbeth's desire may be narrowed to when the witches address him prophetically, and proclaim that he is not only to be counted as the "Thane of Glamis" (*Macbeth* 1.3.46) but also the "Thane of Cawdor" (1.3.47), and that he "shalt be king [there]after" (1.3.48). It may seem particularly odd to some that Macbeth's first inclination after hearing the witches' claims is to be doubtful, especially given the subsequent events that take place in the play; yet according to Girard's theory of mimesis, Macbeth acts precisely as he should. As Girard argues, the figures in a mimetic conflict—referred to as the "model" and the "disciple" respectively—cannot help but question their roles; "the model," Girard writes, "considers himself too far above the disciple, the disciple considers himself too far below the model" (Girard 147). So when Macbeth states that "to be king / Stands not within the prospect of belief, / No more than to be Cawdor" (*Macbeth* 1.3.71-73), he is still acting within the acceptable parameters of mimetic desire. Further, as the scene develops, Macbeth's acceptance of what the witches have told him rapidly replaces his apprehension, which is most observable after Ross and Angus bequeath him with Cawdor's title and he states, "Two truths are told / As happy prologues to the swelling act / Of the imperial theme" (1.3.126-128). Macbeth's language is not only a striking example of an anticipatory sentiment, but more importantly it seamlessly precedes the most ostensible language of Macbeth's involvement in a mimetic rivalry with Duncan:

...why do I yield to that suggestion  
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair  
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs  
Against the use of nature? Present fears

Are less than horrible imaginings.  
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man that function  
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is  
But what is not. (1.3.133-141)

That speech is Macbeth's ultimate desire laid bare and encapsulates that very essence of mimesis within the play. It is from that speech that all subsequent instances of sacrifice may draw their origin, and it is that speech which truly manifests as the most basic posit of Girard's entire theory of sacrificial violence: "Violent opposition...is the signifier of ultimate desire" (Girard 148).

If Macbeth is the key archetype of violence and sacrifice in *Macbeth*, then the witches, who serve in part as the agents of his desire, are no less pivotal figures in regard to sacrifice of the play. Indeed, as characters, the witches no less actively participate in sacrifice. Their participation may be seen most clearly during the infamous cauldron passages of the play in Act 4, Scene 1, for while the cauldron episode is textually an example of dark magic, it is inherently also an example of a highly sacrificial ritual. As Girard notes on the nature of sacrifice, "There is in fact no object or endeavor in whose name a sacrifice cannot be made, especially when the social basis of the act has begun to blur" (8). Given that the witches describe their cauldron ritual to Macbeth as "A deed without a name" (*Macbeth* 4.1.65), it is most certainly well beyond any definable social basis. Additionally, as the meeting between Macbeth, Banquo, and the witches in Act 1 shows, the witches are part of the supernatural in the play; they are above nature and are abnormal, social outcasts who are attended by demons and must convene in secret in order

to do harm to others. The social basis with which Girard is concerned is most definitely blurred by these facts, and as a result may the witches carry out a sacrificial ritual through the Girardian model even though such an act is veiled by an entertaining dance and magic show.

Similarly, how the witches carry out their involvement with sacrificial rite and ritual in the play is of no less importance. Focusing once more on the cauldron passages of Act 4, Scene 1, the elements of sacrifice are quite literally present in the fascinating ingredients that the witches' add to their infamous brew. Those ingredients include such gnarly fetishes as "Eye of newt and toe of frog, / Wool of bat and tongue of dog, / ...Liver of blaspheming Jew, / ...Nose of Turk, and Tartar's lips" (4.1.14-29) among other less than pleasant oddities. By taking all these things and combining them into the cauldron for a foul purpose, the witches emulate a sacrificial ritual. Further, while there at first may seem to be a fashion of dichotomy between these ingredients inasmuch as the animal parts seem somehow less appropriate as sacrificial objects than the human parts, especially given that Girard concerns himself far more with sacrifice and violence among human beings, it must be noted that there is truly no separating what constitutes a "non-sacrificial" ingredient from a "sacrificial" ingredient or what constitutes a "non-proper" sacrificial ingredient from a "proper" sacrificial ingredient. As Girard clarifies about sacrificial objects, "There is no essential difference between animal sacrifice and human sacrifice" (Girard 10), and thus the parts the witches choose to throw into the cauldron, be such parts of animal origin or human origin, are equivalent under the lens of the Girardian concept of sacrifice, as well as being reminiscent of traditional religious sacrifice, in which animals are chosen in place of humans for a sacrificial ritual.

Returning now to the mimesis of *Macbeth*, the mimetic relationship that begins between Cawdor and Duncan and then evolves so to be between Macbeth and Duncan is perhaps the most significant mimetic progression of the entire play. Both sets of rivalries are begotten by intense desire and fueled by violence, and the rivalries, if conjoined as to be seen as one mimetic interplay, serve as a fantastic illustration of Girard's entire theory. According to Girard, when the "model" of a mimetic rivalry learns of his position, he is not only "surprised to find himself engaged in competition" (146), but he "concludes that the disciple has betrayed his confidence by following in his footsteps" (146). Such perfidious interaction is first noted between Cawdor and Duncan, who as the servant/master dynamic already shows, are set as rivals due to Cawdor's ill attempt at rebellion. Duncan displays the appropriate sense of betrayal and surprise at Cawdor's treachery in two different passages. In Act 1, Scene 2, he declares how "No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive / Our bosom interest," facilitating betrayal; and in Act 1, Scene 4, he admits that "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face. / [Cawdor] was a gentleman on whom I built / An absolute trust" (1.4.12-14), facilitating surprise.

The same semblance of perfidious interaction may be noted between Macbeth and Duncan, although the irony is that Macbeth, as the superior rival to Duncan, does not allow Duncan to take note of his violent intentions. Indeed, Duncan hails Macbeth with the same language of praise in Act 1, Scene 4 as he does Cawdor earlier, naming Macbeth "worthiest cousin" (1.4.14), "worthy Cawdor" (1.4.47), and "peerless kinsman" (1.4.58). Further, Duncan not only declares in Act 1, Scene 4 that "[Macbeth] is full so valiant. / And in his commendations I am fed" (1.4.44-45), but in Act 1, Scene 6 Duncan states, "We love him highly, / And shall continue our graces towards him" (1.5.29-30). In construing Macbeth's

response to the entirety of Duncan's praise, but one passage is required. That passage, the second most ostensible language of Macbeth's mimetic desire and violent intention, falls directly after Duncan names Malcolm the Prince of Cumberland—his chosen successor—in Act 1, Scene 4. Macbeth states, "The Prince of Cumberland—that is a step / On which I must fall down or else o'erleap, / For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fire, / Let not light see my black and deep desires" (1.4.48-51).

As Macbeth's intent is clear, his subsequent murder of Duncan brings the mimetic rivalry between them to a head and serves as a pivotal example of sacrifice within the tragedy. As Girard points out, in any sacrifice "the victim is sacred, [and] it is criminal to kill him—but the victim is sacred only because he is to be killed" (Girard 1). Such sentiment is triply applicable to the case of Macbeth and Duncan, for if it is a crime to murder any faceless figure merely named "victim," then if it is a crime to murder one who has become a houseguest, and it is surely a crime to murder one's own king—a figure, no less, with whom one is supposed to share the dynamic of the servant/master bond. Yet contrary to what the word "murder" may seem to imply, there is but a superficial difference between words such as "murder," and "victim," and "sacrifice" in Girard's model. As Girard argues, "sacrifice and murder would not lend themselves to this game of reciprocal substitution if they were not in some way related" (1). It is important to realize that sacrifice and murder are not identical to Girard, but they are related to such a degree that even though Macbeth's thoughts are drawn to "murder" in his Act 1, Scene 3 speech, his language may as well read "sacrifice," and even though Duncan is king, he may as well just as easily be another faceless "victim." Thus, Duncan's murder, which is to say Duncan's sacrifice, is far more apropos to the resolution of a mimetic rivalry than simply being an act of regicide.

In sacrificing Duncan, Macbeth ensures that the throne of Scotland will be his; the “black and deep desires” and “murder yet fantastical” which plague his mind serve their mimetic purpose.

Yet in spite of that, there remains a peculiar aftereffect to Macbeth’s succession to the Scottish throne that need be examined. In Girard’s model, one of the primary reasons mimesis is so effective is that a successful sacrifice takes place. Girard argues that when “polarized by the sacrificial killing, violence is appeased. It subsides” (265). If that were indeed true, then Macbeth’s reign of terror should not take place. Clearly, something is amiss. The issue, however, does not reside with Girard’s model so much as it does with the character of Macbeth himself. To elaborate, after succeeding the throne, Macbeth is no longer able to partake in public sacrificial rite by means of slaying Duncan’s enemies, and thus he begins to shy away from the expected public sacrificial violence of a mimetic conflict and causes a litany of private deaths in his growing paranoia and madness. Such deaths, though they may not immediately seem a part of the same reciprocal substitution that allows “victim,” and “sacrifice,” and “murder” to be interchangeable, are in fact part of the same strain. That is because Girard maintains “the difference between sacrificial and nonsacrificial violence is anything but exact; it is even arbitrary” (40). Further, there remains “a fundamental truth about violence; if left unappeased, violence will accumulate until it overflows its confines and floods the surrounding area” (10). Given such knowledge, it is little wonder why Macbeth’s reign is marked by a stint of unexpected violence rather than appeasement as Girard’s model states it should otherwise present. The public violence which so well maintains the security of Scotland during Duncan’s rule is forcibly replaced by Macbeth’s own secretive private violence, which itself begins with the

act of secretive violence causing Duncan's death. When no longer public, proper sacrificial violence cannot control outbreaks of maleficent violence such as those constituting Macbeth's bloody time as king. Even so, not all the violence and death that takes place during Macbeth's time as king is arbitrary; there yet remain two distinct mimetic rivalries which Macbeth participates in order to, as his paranoia demands he believe, retain the throne.

The first of such rivalries is between Macbeth and Banquo. The conflict between these two characters is interesting inasmuch as Macbeth, who now takes up the mantle of mimetic "model" rather than mimetic "disciple" because he is king, sees in Banquo the qualities of a disciple. Those qualities present themselves in Banquo through the same notions of surprise and betrayal as earlier encountered when Duncan speaks of Cawdor. In Act 3, Scene 1, they are made manifest when Macbeth admits not only how "Our fears in Banquo / Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature / Reigns that which would be feared" (*Macbeth* 3.1.50-52), but also how "There is none but he / Whose being I do fear, and under him / My genius is rebuked as, it is said, / Mark Antony's was by Caesar" (3.1.55-58). To elevate any character to the point that character is indistinguishable from one of the Caesars is a very dangerous action in any of Shakespeare's works, especially given the ambition and pragmatism expressed by Augustus in *Antony and Cleopatra*, who Macbeth is referencing, or the ultimate fate of Julius Caesar in *Julius Caesar*. Yet all whimsicalness aside, the comparison between Banquo and Augustus must nevertheless be well met. If Macbeth's paranoid mind, mimetic violence must be brought against Banquo so that Macbeth may retain his kingship and his mind "be safely thus" (3.1.50). Correspondingly, it is interesting to note that Banquo's own wishes never materialize in the play. While he

does soliloquize in Act 3, Scene 1, he never reveals his personal thoughts; thus, it is impossible to truly surmise whether Banquo possesses any desire or plan to overthrow and sacrifice Macbeth in the same way Macbeth overthrows and sacrifices Duncan. Ultimately, it matters not; as Girard shows, all intended sacrificial violence, whether being utilized in a truly sacrificial manner or not, remains arbitrary.

The second rivalry into which Macbeth throws himself is with the Macduff family. That mimetic rivalry is no less interesting than the former, but rather than its importance being drawn from an inverse of the “model” and “disciple” roles, its importance stems from how it employs the use of Girard’s notion of the surrogate victim. It is important to observe that the true rivalry between Macbeth and the Macduff family is between Macbeth and Macduff himself; however, because Macduff has fled Scotland with Malcolm, Lady Macduff and Macduff’s children become the target of Macbeth’s violence. What is further interesting about the rivalry between Macbeth and Macduff is that its origin in the play is strikingly different than any rivalry thus far explicated. Rather than the rivalry originating through means of direct interaction between the two characters involved, Macbeth conceives the idea of rivalry with Macduff through the witches. Prior to Macbeth’s second meeting with the hags in Act 4, Scene 1, there is no textual evidence that supports the argument he will bring violence against Macduff; however, after the witches’ spirits tell Macbeth to “beware Macduff, / Beware the Thane of Fife” (4.1.87-88), Macbeth resolves himself to the mimetic rivalry and decides he must “make assurance double sure, / And take a bond of fate [Macduff] shalt not live” (4.1.99-100).

One may argue that the rivalry between Macbeth and Macduff comes to an appropriately bloody Girardian end during their duel in Act 5, Scene 10, and one would



not be wrong for arguing thus. Yet the time between Act 4, Scene 1 and Act 5, Scene 10 is, at least textually speaking, most significant, and comprises the most notable event in the rivalry between Macbeth and Macduff. That being the slaughter of Macduff's family in Act 4, Scene 2. As Girard observes, "when unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited its fury is abruptly replaced by another, chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand" (Girard 2). Accordingly, the creature to first excite fury is Macduff himself, because it is he with whom Macbeth has a rivalry, and thus it is Lady Macduff who correspondingly becomes the surrogate victim toward whom Macbeth's violence shifts. Girard further observes that, in regard to the relationship between victim and surrogate victim, "it is essential that the victim be drawn from outside the community. The surrogate victim, by contrast, is a member of the community" (265). There is both a literal manner of interpretation regarding such a notion, and there is also a more culturally-based manner of interpretation more in tune with Girard's thinking; ironically, either viewpoint is sufficient in order to reach the same conclusion regarding the status of Macduff and Lady Macduff as respective victim and surrogate victim. In regard to the former, because Macduff has fled Scotland to be with one of Duncan's children, both of whom Macbeth has people believing are "In England and in Ireland, not confessing / Their cruel patricide" (*Macbeth* 3.1.32-33), Macduff effectively ostracizes himself from the Scottish community. Respectively, in regard to the latter, Girard states, "if the sacrificial victim belonged to the community (as does the surrogate victim), then his death would promote further violence instead of dispelling it. Far from reiterating the effects of generative violence, the sacrifice would inaugurate a new crisis" (Girard 269). Since Macbeth's reign of terror does not end with the slaughter of Lady Macduff, who is

chosen specifically because she is conveniently vulnerable and close at hand, then Macbeth cannot find an appropriate enough victim through her in order to polarize her from Macduff and appease his violent mimetic inclinations.

The final significant case of mimesis in *Macbeth* may be extrapolated as a mimetic rivalry between Lady Macbeth and Macbeth himself. The mimetic conflict which they endure begins in Act 1, Scene 5 as Lady Macbeth reads aloud Macbeth's letter detailing his experience with the witches. In her lamentations over what she believes to be suggestions of Macbeth's overly compassionate nature, "too full o'th' milk of human kindness" (*Macbeth* 1.5.15), she not only bids the "spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex [her] here" (1.5.38-40) but to also "Come to [her] woman's breasts, / And take [her] milk for gall" (1.5.45-46). Such an appeal to a supernatural force requesting a metamorphic outcome is, to Girard, a direct implication of one's own inner violent tendencies. As Girard observes, the "transformation of the real into the unreal is part of the process by which man conceals from himself the human origin of his own violence, by attributing it to the gods" (Girard 161). Although Lady Macbeth calls upon "spirits" rather than any deities, the concept is intrinsically identical. Lady Macbeth is shifting her own innate violent desire onto the supernatural so that she will not later regret being "[filled] from the crown to the toe top-full / Of direst cruelty" (*Macbeth* 1.5.40-41) or let any "compunctious visiting of nature shake [her] fell purpose" (1.5.43-44). Further, whether or not the actual spirits present in the play hear and obey her request is inconsequential; as already observed by Girard, there is "no object or endeavor in whose name a sacrifice cannot be made," and thus Lady Macbeth's masked violence is a viable gateway into her mimetic conflict with Macbeth.

Yet like all mimetic conflicts, so too must Lady Macbeth's conflict with her husband reach a resolution. Given Lady Macbeth's ultimate fate, it stands to reason that her suicide appropriately ends the conflict. Additionally, within the Girardian model of sacrifice, her death is far more aligned with a ritual act of sacrifice than a mere suicide. Girard offers no insight into suicide or self-harm, and thus it must be argued that either form of violence is no different than the violence imposed against another. The most informative testimony about Lady Macbeth's demise falls directly in the center of Malcolm's final speech in Act 5, Scene 11. Malcolm's language is specifically clear, when of her death he reports, "[Lady Macbeth], as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands / Took off her life" (5.11.36-37). Quickly stated and even more quickly forgotten, Malcolm's verse does little in the way of alluding to further detail about her suicide, which is most sensible since there exists no textual evidence directly relating the event or the reason for it in *Macbeth*. Regardless, what Malcolm's statement does offer is verification of a Girardian mode of sacrifice at work. That Lady Macbeth's hands are described as being "violent" during the action of her suicide is particularly important, because such a description is perfectly reminiscent of the innate personal violence that she seeks to shift in Act 1, the violence Girard describes. Further, Lady Macbeth's decision to harm herself may be viewed as a natural redirection of her inability to harm Duncan in Act 2, since he "resembled / [Her] father as he slept" (2.2.12-13). As already noted by Girard, "when unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim;" and if left too long in finding that victim "violence will accumulate until it overflows."

Lady Macbeth's paranoia and awkward behavior in Act 5 may be seen similarly as stemming from the mimetic rivalry with Macbeth that begins in Act 1. When the

Gentlewoman speaks to the Doctor of Physic about Lady Macbeth's behavior and states, "It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus / washing her hands. I have known her to continue in this a quarter / of an hour" (5.1.24-26), the Gentlewoman is highlighting the consequences imposed by Lady Macbeth's appeal to the spirits to shift her violence appropriately. Additionally, Lady Macbeth's paranoid behavior may be seen as evocative of any repressed guilt and remorse she feels as an accomplice to Duncan's death, even though she herself is unable to kill him. Indeed, Lady Macbeth's own subconscious wills itself against her, as she quite often attempts in vain to rid herself of both the "damned spot" (5.1.30) and "smell of the blood" (5.1.42) still metaphorically on her hands. Due to her outlet of violence being continually put off, then, the madness which consumes her leaves her with but one ultimate recourse. In order to rid herself of madness and polarize the violence of the mimetic rivalry, Lady Macbeth must commit suicide—must sacrifice herself—as Malcolm informs. Thus, the character of Lady Macbeth is representative of the lesser half of the mimetic rivalry between herself and Macbeth; the half ill-equipped to endure the violent behavior necessary in order to achieve victory. While Macbeth grows from a man who is "too full o'th' milk of human kindness" into a man who slaughters indiscriminately, Lady Macbeth is never capable of growing in kind, leading to her death at her own hands.

Beyond Lady Macbeth's excursion into self-sacrifice, it is lastly worth noting that she falls just short of practicing sacrifice in the play in a far more explicit sense. That may be seen just prior to the murder of King Duncan during Lady Macbeth and Macbeth's marital quarrel. As Lady Macbeth accuses Macbeth of losing his will to kill the sleeping king, she states, "I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks

me. / I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums / And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn / As you have done to this” (1.7.54-59). Such chastising is a flawless example of the conviction Lady Macbeth seeks to gain in her appeal to the spirits earlier in Act 1 so that she might commit Duncan’s murder in case her “kind” Macbeth cannot. However, in the Girardian model, Lady Macbeth’s language invokes the notion of a surrogate victim, a child who would bear the reception of her violence in Duncan’s place if such a child in fact existed.

### CHAPTER III

#### Macbeth, Scapegoat of Scotland: Religious Turmoil and Crisis of Degree

The type of religious bondage unconsciously suggested by the work of Hager and Anderson is nothing unusual or unexpected to Girard. The controlling force, the problems of interpretation, and the consequences that arise when the two grow out of balance and can no longer coexist harmoniously are all natural phenomena that inform the tenuous relationship between religion and violence in any culture be it real or fictional. As Girard states on the matter in *Violence and the Sacred*, “Religion instructs men as to what they must and must not do to prevent a recurrence of destructive violence” (Girard 259). It might be thought easily affirmed, then, that the death of Caesar appeases Hager’s bloodthirsty gods, and that the death of Cordelia is enough for Anderson’s masses of Englishmen to come to terms with their interpretive dilemmas. For if such things were truly the answers to the problems, then the gods would remain appeased and the masses would cease to question. Yet such things do not occur; the gods grow unsated once more in the chaotic aftermath of Caesar’s demise, and the people of England, as Anderson notes, continuously grow to experience more and more “uncertainty surrounding acts of sacrificial violence in Reformation England” (Anderson 260). As such, it is not enough for one to focus solely

on the successful manner by which religion may curb recurring violence in Girard's model, one must also see fit to focus on what might happen when the supernatural or religious body that influences the model fails to uphold its mandate to control violence.

In *Macbeth*, the position of supernatural force is conventionally thought to be occupied by the androgynous witches. While that is certainly not incorrect inasmuch as it accounts for the lack of normative behavior embodied by the witches, it also fails to account for the greater supernatural force that commands them in the play. The figure who occupies the position of the supernatural to the greatest extent in *Macbeth* is instead the Greek goddess Hecate, who as a primordial deity associated with witchcraft is fully fit to oversee the witches' ill machinations. Further, as a true deified figure, Hecate is well suited for examination under the lens of the Girardian model, both in regard to her status as what Girard might refer to as a mythical double, and also in regard to how she is partially incapable of controlling the witches, who should otherwise act at all times subservient to her in order to prevent recurrences of destructive violence, which religion according to Girard's model is meant to accomplish.

In regard to the idea of a mythical double, Girard notes that "there is no ancient divinity who does not have a double face" (Girard 251). That may of course be taken in the most literal context, as Girard does acknowledge on occasion the more bestial qualities of certain mythical figures; however, it is far more fortuitous to understand Girard's idea in respect to what might be best considered its more religious attribute. That is to say, the attribute which specifically corresponds to any of the numerous "things" that any particular mythic deity is thought to oversee and is thus fit for worship. Examples of that phenomenon include the Roman god Janus, who is god of past and future—among other things—and

who is depicted literally as two-faced; similarly, the Roman goddess Trivia, who stands as Hecate's Roman equivalent, is known as a triple-goddess rather than even merely a double. In regard to *Macbeth's* incarnation of Hecate, even the most cursory glance at the text of the play is enough to ascertain that Hecate retains her place as the goddess of witchcraft, yet it is worth noting that *Macbeth* is not the only Shakespeare play in which Hecate appears. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Hecate is not only referenced by Puck as a goddess of the night (5.2.14), but she is concurrently referenced by Hippolyta as a goddess of the moon in Act 1; in *King Lear*, Hecate is referenced by Lear himself as being a mysterious deity of the night (1.1.110); in *Hamlet*, the player in the role of Lucianus in Hamlet's play-within-a-play invokes Hecate as the goddess of witchcraft (3.2.236); and lastly, in *Henry VI Part 1*, Lord Talbot criticizes Joan la Pucelle as a "railing Hecate" (3.5.24), essentially implying that Pucelle is raving or chanting as one who is involved with witchcraft. These instances of Hecate's appearance on stage, if not but through the words of numerous characters, adequately serve as confirmation enough that she should be regarded in Shakespeare's works on a whole in the role of a mythical double as Girard's theory implies.

Doubling in Girard's mythical manner does carry with it a second connotation that is no less important than the first. This second aspect of a mythical double concerns itself with what might be best understood as how the personalities of deities themselves tend to shift between two varying extremes. Such a notion is certainly not without great precedent in the mythological world, and even Girard's own brief catalogue of mythic deities reinforces the notion most succinctly and clearly: "Dionysus is at one and the same time the 'most terrible' and the 'most gentle' of the gods. There is a Zeus who hurls thunderbolts



and a Zeus ‘as sweet as honey’” (Girard 251). Further examples include the Roman goddess Minerva, renowned as being a goddess of esteemed wisdom and justice while simultaneously exhibiting ferocity on the field of war; or the Greek god Poseidon, whose tenderness as the creator of the horse is counterbalanced by the terrible rage he exhibits as the creator of raging storms at sea. In each of these four examples, one must note the sheer extremes to which any mythic figure may turn, and further that in any of the four cases, one extreme is rooted in kindness, justice, or fidelity while the other extreme is rooted in violence, warfare, or anger. As Girard states, “religious thought perceives all those who participate in this violent interplay, whether actively or passively, as doubles” (251); which is to otherwise imply that any mythical figure will not only be multifaceted, but that one aspect of such complexity will be represented by chaos or violence.

In *Macbeth*, Hecate is truly no different in regard to her double-ness than any other mythic deity herein discussed. Already may it be stated with conviction that the Hecate of Shakespeare’s works is doubled according to Girard’s primary criterion, being both goddess of witchcraft and the moon, but so too is she doubled according to the secondary criterion, although it is perhaps not at all as overtly apparent. It must be suggested, then, that there is more to Hecate than one may first suspect. Rather than merely being content to view the goddess as solely a source of evil in the play, a character who is only concerned with continuing to cause violence and chaos to define Macbeth’s life, one must instead also lend attention to the Hecate who is equally concerned with, just as Girard is concerned with, a sense of hierarchal order and one’s proper adherence to it. In order to accomplish such a feat, the two scenes in which Hecate appears must be examined chronologically as to show how Hecate both fails to uphold her mandate as the play’s premier supernatural

force, and also how she endeavors to correct that error so as to properly regulate religion as Girard deems religion must be regulated.

It is, however, important to note that simply because Hecate is meant to act as the religious controlling force behind the witches' machinations, her guidance does not necessarily imply a sense of goodness or peace. As Anderson notes, what a religious body preaches and what a religious body practices are not necessarily so mutually inclusive. Further, this argument is not meant to at all imply that those who inhabit Shakespeare's fictional Scotland are represented as worshipping pagan deities; quite clearly the Judeo-Christian God is on the minds and lips of characters such as Duncan and the Doctor, and even earnestly on the mind and lips of Macbeth himself for a time. Yet as Girard argues, peoples who maintain religious practices in any primitive society, of which Shakespeare's England should be considered a part given its dogmatic belief in but a single "correct" approach to religion, will find themselves "incapable or grasping the essence of religion and attributing to it a real function" (259). That function being foremost the ability to control violence. So it does not matter whether the religion or religious figure being depicted on stage is of the Judeo-Christian persuasion or a primordial pagan deity such as Hecate; the end result, the Girardian model for religious control, is the same.

That being so, Hecate's first appearance in *Macbeth* in Act 3, Scene 5 is a most curious amalgamation of pagan magic and Girardian religious control that successfully bring the religious turmoil present in *Macbeth* to a head. Such turmoil is introduced by the First Witch, who in an effort to announce Hecate's arrival as well as bring attention to the problem at hand asks the exasperated goddess, "Why, how now, Hecate? You look angrily" (*Macbeth* 3.5.1). Hecate's reply is most illuminating:

Have I not reason, beldams as you are?  
Saucy and over-bold, how did you dare  
To trade and traffic with Macbeth  
In riddles and affairs of death,  
And I, the mistress of your charms,  
The close contriver of all harms,  
Was never called to bear my part  
Or show the glory of our art? (3.5.2-9)

What Hecate references in her anger during that opening speech is twofold. Foremost, she acknowledges the complete collapse of the system of religious control for which she is meant to be responsible. By speaking to Macbeth of their own accord, the witches have gone beyond their station and dallied with the rites of control that belong to religion alone. Secondly, Hecate recognizes that due to the witches' transgression, the chaotic fallout that follows the adequate collapse of the system has already begun. Anderson so gracefully translates these twofold issues into more technical Girardian terms by observing that in "Girard's study of myth and primitive religion, the crisis occurs when the rites of surrogate violence no longer unite, but divide, removing the dam of controlled and controlling violence which protects the community from a return to chaotic, undifferentiated retribution" (Anderson 263). Since the witches have ignored the supreme rite belonging to religion—the rite to cast and control violence onto the people—the ultimate consequence of their misbehavior is the unadulterated spread of destructive violence throughout Scotland. Macbeth, the target of the witches' whims, thus takes on a very peculiar role in Girard's model of religious control. Not only is Macbeth a Girardian scapegoat, but he is a

scapegoat working against the grain; his spread of destructive violence is precisely what religion as Girard argues it is meant to deter. Hecate additionally concedes Macbeth's twisted purpose in the play during her opening speech when she perceives how everything "[the witches] have done / Hath been but for a wayward son, / Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do, / Loves for his own ends, not for [them]" (*Macbeth* 3.5.10-13). The point is clear: Macbeth does not incite acts of violence on behalf of the witches, nor does he incite violence on behalf of Hecate and thus for the sake of maintaining the purpose of religion; rather, Macbeth's instigations of destructive violence serve only himself in order to appease his unending paranoia and bloodlust.

The great irony of Macbeth's situation is that it did not necessarily have to occur as it did according to Girard's model of religious control. On a metaphysical level, such an argument may be made without crossing the boundary into a baseless "what if" scenario, because there is in fact precedent for what true religious control looks like in *Macbeth*. That precedent begins during the ill-fated first meeting between Hecate and the witches. When Hecate commands her trio of androgynous hags to "make amends now. Get you gone, / And at the pit of Acheron / Meet me i'th' morning" (3.5.14-16), she is reestablishing the framework of subservience to religion in the play. Further, when she subsequently commands the trio that "[their] vessels and [their] spells provide, / [their] charms and everything beside" (3.5.18-19) in anticipation of Macbeth's eminent arrival, the framework is further solidified. When the following morning arrives in what accounts for Act 4, Scene 1, the second and final scene in which Hecate plays a part, the witches act wholly subservient to Hecate's whims, and the goddess herself continues to command by means of having direct involvement in the completion of the witches' famous brew, the very same

“vessel” and “spell” she previously bid them create. Due to Hecate’s ability to control the witches and involve herself with the brew, she finally and correctly assumes the mantle of *Macbeth*’s premier supernatural force. She is also able, it is worth noting, to at last use her mythical arts in order to become the “close contriver of all harms” as she so previously desired so that she might further ensnare Macbeth, the poor scapegoat. Additionally, for the sake of clarity, the reinvigoration of religious control in the play may indeed be described in a more stratified manner. Narrowed particularly to Act 4, Scene 1, in which the control remains the most apparent, one may understand it more succinctly in terms of the witches’ brew. For each gnarly ingredient the witches desire to add to the brew, Hecate not only allows them to do so but determines what allowance of the ingredient is to be added. The following interplay details the control:

FOURTH WITCH. Here’s the blood of a bat.

HECATE. Put in that, O put in that!

FIFTH WITCH. Here’s leopard’s bane.

HECATE. Put in a grain.

FOURTH WITCH. The juice of toad, the oil of adder.

FIFTH WITCH. Those will make the younker madder.

HECATE. Put in, there’s all, and rid the stench. (4.1.51-57)

In that exchange, there is neither debate nor derision; Hecate commands while the witches follow her insidious instructions. The crisis which Anderson states will occur when the rite of violence is ignored, or more precisely the crisis Girard suggests will take place when religion fails to prevent recurrences of destructive violence, is ended in *Macbeth* by Act 4,

Scene 1. Yet simply because the religious turmoil of the play has been weathered does not at all imply that further damage will not ultimately be done before Macbeth is killed.

Indeed, in spite of Hecate's ability to reconstitute her religious control in *Macbeth*, and in doing so perhaps in part curb a greater crisis from occurring, there remains a "crisis" of a wholly different sort that pervades the play. That second crisis is informed by what is formally known as Girard's theory of *undifferentiation*, more commonly referred to as the *sacrificial crisis* or even more colloquially as the *crisis of degree*. In Girard's own terminology, the crisis of degree "can be defined...as a crisis of distinctions—that is, a crisis affecting the cultural order" (Girard 49); and even more simply put, the crisis of degree may be understood as the dissolution of defined hierarchal roles leading society into a state of absolute chaos. In *Macbeth*, the social order that is so uniform in the model of a standard kingship, whether that model is based on heredity as it is in England or rather based on electivity as in Scotland, is forcibly ended by the death of Duncan at Macbeth's hands in Act 1. It is tempting to view the dissolution of culture as being present earlier in the play, specifically when Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches, because the erosion of gender categories so well personified by the witches does lend itself to the notion of cultural disorder. To recognize that is not wrong; as Girard further details, a cultural order is "a regulated system of distinctions in which the differences among individuals are used to establish their 'identity' and their mutual relationships" (49). Being unable to even identify the gender of the witches with certainty as Macbeth and Banquo are most definitely calls into question the "identity" of the hags, and it further seems to corrode any regulation Scotland's social system. Regardless, the issue of gender in *Macbeth* is in itself a gateway to a completely different set of problems, and one is better served following the play's

crisis of degree down an entirely different strain of thought. That being, it is far more prudent to understand the crisis of degree as it pertains to Macbeth himself and his role as the scapegoat of Scotland, into which he is so unwittingly thrown. In order to accomplish that endeavor, the manner by which religious control may be separated from the crisis of degree in Girard's model must be made manifest.

As Girard asserts, "sacrifice too can be defined solely in terms of the sacred, without reference to any particular divinity; that is, it can be defined in terms of maleficent violence polarized by the victim and metamorphosed by his death...into beneficent violence" (258). Essentially, Girard's assertion implies that even if a culture were without a particular overseeing religious body or mythic figure, the institution of sacrifice as a means of maintaining and regulating social order would remain much the same as it would under religious control as long as a sufficient victim could take up the mantle of the religious body or mythic figure. The caveat, of course, is that any such culture containing such a victim would not only be far more unstable, but the dissolution of its regulated system of identity leading to the crisis of degree would entail far more extreme consequences. Such a fate would befall the culture because "anything that adversely affects the institution of sacrifice will ultimately pose a threat to the very basis of the community, to the principles on which its social harmony and equilibrium depend" (49). Within the confines of *Macbeth*, when the importance of Hecate and her status as the play's premier supernatural force are ignored, then it becomes the titular character's own rise to power that constitutes the very process by which the institution of sacrifice, and thus also the regulated system of Scotland's identity and basis of its community, become threatened.

Macbeth himself becomes the victim required of Girard's model; and in Girard's model, the victim is always sacred.

Additionally, *Macbeth* is a particularly fascinating work to apply the notion of a sacred victim to precisely due to the presence of a king in its fictional community. Taking into account the idea of divine kingship that was so pervasively critical in Shakespeare's era for but a moment, it is further worth noting that even if a particular divinity such as Hecate were absent, there would remain a type of divinity left in control. That divinity is of course he who holds the title of king, for as Girard observes, "royalty is an incarnation of the sacred" (258). Some may doubt the veracity of Macbeth's kingship given that it is earned by regicide, but such thinking is irrational. Scotland, as an elective monarchy, is not stymied by the same rules as an English hereditary monarchy. As long as there is a man who holds the title of king, then that man is indeed the king; and in Shakespeare's works, no play concerned with kingship ends without a king. Thus, Macbeth is inarguably King of Scotland, and as such he is sacred. Yet as Girard goes on to observe, "the sacred king is also a monster. He is simultaneously god, man, and savage beast" (252). These four descriptive qualities—god, man, savage beast, and most importantly, sacred—when held in conjunction, not only describe Macbeth the King in a most earnest fashion from his rise to power until his death, but they also offer a satisfactory measure of his status as the sacred victim, which is to say the scapegoat, of the play. As such, one can look solely upon Macbeth without regarding Hecate when examining the crisis of degree within the play.

As the instigator of all maleficent and beneficent violence that fuels the play's crisis of degree, Macbeth is in his own way as equally two-faced or doubled as any mythic or god-like figure. Certainly that may be rationalized through his qualities of godhood,



manhood, bestly savagery, and sacredness, but such qualities together are only Macbeth's after his ascension to the throne. Prior to his tyrannical reign, there is a very different Macbeth present in the play with what may be described as a partially different set of qualities. That earlier Macbeth is, for convenience, a character who might be better called Macbeth the Warrior. The warrior persona of Macbeth is one who is certainly no stranger to savagery, and in his own way he is neither stranger to godhood or stranger to being one who carries out sacrificial rites, as well. It must be conceded, then, that while the two different Macbeths within the play do share a certain degree of similarity, Macbeth the Warrior and Macbeth the King are ultimately two very different characters according to Girard's model. More importantly, the crisis of degree that throws Scotland into chaos is begun by the former and ends with the death of the latter.

The former Macbeth, Macbeth the Warrior, is mentioned first toward the play's onset, but his only true time on stage is during the two duels he fights at the end of the tragedy—one of which he loses at the cost of his own life. Prior to those duels, Macbeth the Warrior is only mentioned, and what may be immediately noticed about him is his absolutely savagery in battle. This savagery is described by the wounded captain in Act 1, Scene 2 who has seen Macbeth the Warrior draw arms and fight. As the captain states, Macbeth's prowess on the field of battle is so great it manifests in the ability to cleave a man "from the nave to th' chops" (*Macbeth* 1.2.22). Such strength, dexterity, and violent inclinations are certainly reminiscent of one who is bestly or acts savagely, and Girard would most certainly agree, as he states that "the urge to violence triggers certain physical changes that prepare men's bodies for battle" (Girard 2). Such an "urge to violence" is in this particular case within *Macbeth's* narrative a direct result of the rebellious Macdonald,

the poor fool who the captain recounts Macbeth nearly cutting in half. As one who actively rebels, Macdonald is upsetting the social harmony and equilibrium of Scotland, for as Girard states, “any change, however slight, in the hierarchical classification of living creatures risks undermining the whole sacrificial structure” (39). As such, Macdonald is causing the crisis of degree, and when Macbeth the Warrior kills him in order to return harmony and equilibrium to Scotland, Macbeth also effectively ends the crisis caused by Macdonald. Further, that Macbeth chooses to kill Macdonald by means of “bloody execution” (*Macbeth* 1.2.18) is significant because the act of taking a life is directly a part of Girard’s theory of violence. “Death is the ultimate violence that can be inflicted on a living being” (Girard 255) according to Girard, and that Macbeth is so proficient a killer cannot be ignored. As one who carries out the sacrificial rite of killing, Macbeth is savage bar none.

Further, the notion of Macbeth the Warrior is solidified even more when it seeks to account for the particular type of godhood Macbeth experiences prior to becoming a king. That godhood is separable from what Macbeth earns after his ascension to the throne, because it is wholly reliant on Macbeth being on the field of battle. According to Girard, there is an inescapable element of etiquette belonging to violence that expresses the idea that “it is [a] god who supposedly demands the victims; he alone, in principle, who savors the smoke from the altars and requisitions the slaughtered flesh. It is to appease his anger that the killing goes on, that the victims multiply” (7). It is tempting, in light of such knowledge, to view King Duncan as the god for whom Macbeth slaughters; however, if for but a moment Macbeth is viewed through the lens of that idea, then his warrior status may further take on the mantle of a war-god too overcharged with his own abilities to ultimately

do good for the social harmony and equilibrium of the community. While the ability to nearly cleave a grown man in two certainly aides that notion, it is additionally solidified by the way Macbeth is described as being “Bellona’s bridegroom” (*Macbeth* 1.2.53) in the court of King Duncan; and how fitting it is, after all, that a goddess of war should have a god of war as a husband. Yet in greater respect to the notion of violence, the way Duncan sends Macbeth to fight the enemies of the crown prior to his murder is very much akin to Duncan ensuring that wave after wave of human sacrifices will be sent to Macbeth the Warrior-God for the slaughter. In that way is the need for violence as Girard explains it appeased, and so too do such sacrifices appease Macbeth until he becomes king himself and is no longer able to personally benefit from such slaughter.

To briefly address at this junction a particular caveat that may rest in the minds of some, it may be seen fit to argue that the slaughter of Macduff’s family is an act of savagery that Macbeth the King does indeed benefit from as though he were a warrior or a war-god. While perhaps that could arguably be true on a humanistic level, it is more important to point out that the slaughter itself is not as important as the person who does the slaughtering. Although Macbeth the King orders Lady Macduff and her children to be slaughtered, it is not by his own hand that the deaths take place. Such a distinction is critical, because Macbeth the Warrior or War-God always deals out death by his own hand; it is only Macbeth the King who orders others to deal out death for him, such as in the slaughter of the Macduffs or the assassination of Banquo. Similarly, one may argue that it is Macbeth the King who duels Young Siward and Macduff in the final Act and loses; however, such a notion is equally as incorrect. In Act 4, Scene 1, Macbeth is told by the spirits most clearly that “[he] shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam Wood to High

Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him” (4.1.108-110). During the final battle of the play, wood from Birnam does indeed come to Dunsinane, and thus Macbeth’s rule is at an end; Macbeth the King no longer exists. Instead, Macbeth reverts back to his warrior persona and is sacrificed so the social harmony and equilibrium of the community in Scotland may be restored.

Turning lastly to that final battle which “saves” Scotland, it would be quite appropriate to judge it the greatest depiction of the crisis of degree found in *Macbeth*. Fewer things, if any, will upset the social harmony and equilibrium of a cultural than open rebellion. That has already been observed in the failed rebellion brought to Scotland in Act 1 by Macdonald and Cawdor, and it is again observed in Act 5 when Malcolm, Macduff, and the “ten thousand men” (4.3.191) on loan from England bring it to Macbeth. Yet there is a problem. Beyond the chaos of rebellion fueling the crisis of degree, the violent intent of Macduff against Macbeth during the rebellion is not at all evocative of a proper Girardian sacrifice. To elaborate, while Girard does contend the difference between sacrificial and nonsacrificial violence is arbitrary, the motivation behind the actions that utilize such violence is not. Girard argues that “a properly conducted ritual killing is never openly linked to another bloodletting of irregular character. It never allows itself to pass as a deliberate act of retribution” (Girard 25). For Macduff, returning to Scotland to bring the tyranny of Macbeth to an end is secondary; his principle reason for fighting Macbeth is one of retribution. Such intent is directly alluded to in Act 4, Scene 3 after Ross has come to England to speak with Malcolm and relate the ill news that the Macduff family has been “savagely slaughtered” (*Macbeth* 4.3.206). In response to the news, Malcolm’s endeavor to comfort Macduff is said in the language of vengeance. Malcom states, “Be comforted. /

Let's make us medicines of our great revenge / To cure this deadly grief" (4.3.214-216). Not being enough to rouse Macduff, Malcolm continues to counsel him with violent language by stating that Macduff's anger must become "the whetstone of [his] sword. Let grief / Convert to anger: blunt not the heat, enrage it" (4.3.230-231). Finally, in response to Malcolm's continued goading, Macduff concedes the "deliberate act of retribution" that will serve as his vengeance against Macbeth. He states, "Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself. / Within my sword's length set him" (4.3.235-236).

Girard observes that "if the counterviolence were inflicted on the aggressor himself, it would...become an act of pure vengeance, requiring yet another act of vengeance and transforming itself into the very thing it was designed to prevent" (Girard 26). The brief conversation between Macduff and Malcolm in regard to their fight against Macbeth is perfectly indicative of Girard's observation. Further, that the "bloodletting of irregular character" Girard views as a requirement for revenge should come as no surprise as being the slaughter of Lady Macduff. As the surrogate victim, "vulnerable and close at hand" to Macbeth because Macduff himself it not, Lady Macduff is slaughtered merely as part of the mimetic rivalry between Macbeth and Macduff. As already observed, her death does not conclude the rivalry; only the death of Macbeth portends such resolution. With that in mind, it is helpful to realize that "only violence can put an end to violence, and that is why violence is self-propagating. Everyone wants to strike the last blow, and reprisal can thus follow reprisal without any true conclusion ever being reached" (26). Such is the case here; Macbeth slaughters Lady Macduff in an "irregular" act not befitting of mimetic conflict, the crisis of degree during his reign continues to evolve, and Macduff is resigned to an act of pure vengeance rather than sacrificial ritual.

That Scotland survives this sacrificial mess is almost astonishing, but its survival and the insinuation that it will go on to flourish under Malcolm's reign, as well as due to the line of future kings already begotten by Banquo, are correspondingly Girardian in nature. In part, the connection to Girard is an association of historical convenience. Macduff notes in Act 4 how "[Macbeth] has no children" (*Macbeth* 4.3.217) who may continue the reciprocal acts of vengeance that both he and Macbeth have already begun. Such is history. Yet beyond mere convenience lay the notion that, "having sown the seeds of death, the god, ancestor, or mythic hero then dies himself or selects a victim to die in his stead" (Girard 255) so that "the entire community, threatened by the same fate, can be reborn in a new or renewed cultural order" (255). Macbeth the Warrior, the War-God, is dead. In his place there is no substitute made; he is himself the scapegoat that serves as surrogate victim for Scotland's "new cultural order." As Malcolm states at the very end of the tragedy, from the moment he is recognized as Scotland's rightful king, his most trusted thanes will "Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland / In such an honour named" (*Macbeth* 5.11.29-30), and the destructive violence of Macbeth's tyrannical reign will forever be washed away.

## CHAPTER IV

### “What bloody man is that?”: Causal Undifferentiation and Category Erosion

Throughout the course of *Macbeth*, interrogative expressions that include words such as “what” and “how” are observable well in excess of one-hundred times. So profusely inlaid within the text as they are, the use of such interrogatives denote a sort of endemic urge by the characters of the play to pose queries seeking out clarification or identification. In the Girardian model, the very same process of neurotically searching for and demanding difference amongst things which otherwise appear to be similar is a matter inextricably tied to *undifferentiation*. As previously introduced, undifferentiation is formally associated with the crisis of degree; however, it must be argued that while undifferentiation and crisis of degree act as part of the same overarching ideological concept, they nevertheless function as two independent aspects of that concept. To clarify, whereas undifferentiation serves as the “cause” which leads to violence, the crisis of degree serves as the “effect” of that violence. Undifferentiation is the failure to observe difference, is the blurring of distinct categories, and is the culturally fueled stigma against which people hope to distance themselves; crisis of degree is the action, is the outcome, is the violence itself and the length to which people will go either to perpetuate such violence or, if mimesis and sacrifice work

as they are designed, to appease such violence into something beneficent. Admittedly, Girard himself does not directly address the interplay between the two functions of his concept, yet the sheer number of interrogative issues observable in *Macbeth* leading to a severe erosion of categories is in itself a testimony to the notion of their individuality—or what might be otherwise expressed as their own unique differentiation. So if the crisis of degree may articulate the effects of the chaos that seizes Scotland during Macbeth’s tyrannical reign, then the undifferentiation that is so rampant throughout the play will herein serve well as a further pivotal point of discussion in understanding how Girard’s model may be applied to *Macbeth*.

Appropriately enough, then, the presence of the undifferentiation that causes the complete erosion of categories in *Macbeth* begins precisely at the play’s onset, when in Act 1, Scene 1, as the androgynous witches come on stage in order to discuss their future meeting with Macbeth, the First Witch poses the query, “When shall we three meet again?” (*Macbeth* 1.1.1). Ostensibly, there is little investigative value to the question on its own beyond noting how, as the very first line of the play, it is already suggestive of the endemic urge for clarification or identification seen throughout *Macbeth*’s remaining acts. Yet when the Second Witch replies, “When the battle’s lost and won” (1.1.4), the floodgate of undifferentiation is suddenly loosed upon the play. Any battle may be described as “lost” or “won,” but to describe the same battle with terminology at once reflective of both belies any notion of differentiation between defeat and victory. The witches’ language in that scene exemplifies such a lack of differentiation. As language, it is very particular about how it strives to avoid any single description that may identify a thing conclusively one way or another. Due to that, the language of the witches effortlessly erodes distinguishable



categories, which is equally observable when, as one voice, the three witches proclaim, “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.10). Once again, there is no direct distinction made present in the witches’ language in regard to their subject; “fair” is most certainly not “foul,” and “foul” is equally in no way “fair.” The categories which might contain specific meanings for either word individually are shattered when the words are made indistinguishable. Congruently, such lack of distinction is of no surprise to Girard, as he contends that “being made up of differences, language finds it almost impossible to express undifferentiation directly” (Girard 64). A notion well met, especially in regard to the language of the witches. While the direct expression of undifferentiation may prove difficult for a language to articulate, indirect comparisons made between nonsensical opposites or dissimilar pairs certainly achieve a sense of undifferentiation more than adequately.

Yet some may choose to interpret the witches’ language in a completely different manner. To any such individuals, rather than possessing the undifferentiated language requisite for the crisis of degree, the witches are characters who possess language that is just theatrically driven and left purposefully impartial in its inability to create distinguishable ideas. On a superficial level, such an argument is in fact sound. Girard describes impartiality as language which “implies a deliberate refusal to take sides, a firm commitment to treat both contestants equally. The impartial party is not eager to resolve the issue, does not want to know if there is a resolution; nor does he maintain that resolution is impossible” (45-46). In regard to the witches, the notion of impartiality appears credible. Indeed, given that the witches do not decide whether the battle has been ultimately lost or won, and by extension cannot choose a loser or a victor, and equally given that they do not

decide between whether the day is foul or fair, it is quite tempting to believe that such impartiality exists in their language. Regardless, such impartiality is an illusion. The witches are most decidedly not impartial; they are the “secret, black, and midnight hags” (*Macbeth* 4.1.64) who deliberately set sailors “tempest-tossed” (1.3.24) and willingly contribute to a ritual so beyond normative social behavior that it is “A deed without a name” (4.1.65). With no name, the “deed” has no basis in a Girardian society; there is no other act against which it may be compared and differentiated, and thus it is dangerous, it is undifferentiated, and just as the witches, it is most certainly not impartial.

Further, the illusion of impartiality in the Girardian model is indicative of the very genre of tragedy, which as a genre functions as the antecedent of undifferentiation and category erosion. As Girard argues, “Tragedy begins at [the] point where the illusion of impartiality, as well as the illusions of the adversaries, collapses” (Girard 46). Since there is no doubt that the witches lack impartiality, the only remaining aspect of tragedy left seemingly unaccounted is the presence of any “adversaries” in the text. Yet such adversaries also exist as part of the framework that develops early in Act 1 from which undifferentiation takes hold of the play. Once again stemming from the battle “lost and won,” it is clear that Macbeth is pitted in adversarial combat against the traitor Macdonald during the “fair” and “foul” day on which the play begins in spite of the witches’ language of undifferentiation. As the plot then unfolds, Macdonald is slain by Macbeth on the field of battle while Duncan subsequently orders execution upon Cawdor. The deaths of Macdonald and Cawdor not only mark the end of their individual mimetic desires—more aptly described as the “illusions” that Girard references—but also the end of the essential early adversaries in the play. Thus, the collapse occurs from which tragedy then rises, not

only allowing undifferentiation and category erosion to remain possible and expand, but in doing so create the most striking early example of undifferentiation in Macbeth's character.

As previously argued, when Macbeth is in conflict with Duncan's enemies, he is practicing the sacrificial ritual which retains Scotland's harmony and equilibrium. Yet what is a warrior in a land a peace who is no longer called upon to practice such sacrificial violence? He is blurred, he is unneeded, and he is wholly incapable of differentiating himself from the warrior he is to the man of peace society demands he be. Such is Macbeth's dilemma; his normative category erodes because of undifferentiation, and so he is no longer able to practice the beneficent sacrificial rites Osborne warns must at all times remain upheld. Consequently, Macbeth's dilemma also marks the point at which his mimetic desire and subsequent rivalries take command of his life and begin to inform the crisis of degree seen later in the play. "Tragedy," Girard so observes, "thus shares a fundamental experience with ritual. Both have advanced to the very brink of that terrible abyss wherein all differences disappear" (292), and tragedy "advances toward the truth in the face of reciprocal violence and while assuming the guise of reciprocal violence" (292).

The appropriateness of the tragedy of *Macbeth* opening with the witches' false impartiality and language of undifferentiation only continues to grow apparent as the play continues. Still even within the first Act, such pertinence is observable in Act 1, Scene 3 shortly after it begins. Entering into the Scene, Macbeth echoes the earlier undifferentiation of the witches by noting, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (*Macbeth* 1.3.36). Banquo, as then if on cue, compliments Macbeth's echo by posing a brief interrogative. It is worth noting that the dynamic at work in the play between interrogatives and statements of undifferentiation or category erosion is less stringent and reliant upon chronology than the

dynamic between undifferentiation and the crisis of degree. The latter demands that undifferentiation come before the crisis of degree; yet the former is hindered by no such condition. Rather, what is apparent is that a statement of undifferentiation or category erosion is often followed closely by an interrogative, and vice versa. In Act 1, Scene 3 alone, two further examples of that phenomenon exist merely lines apart. In both examples, it is Banquo's language that serves to instigate the dynamic. The less important of the two examples is as follows:

BANQUO. ...If you can look into the seeds of time  
And say which grain will grow and which will not,  
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear  
Your favours nor your hate.

FIRST WITCH. Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

SECOND WITCH. Not so happy, yet much happier. (1.3.56-64)

Here, the interplay between Banquo and the witches begins with Banquo's interrogative appeal to know his future. Yet what seems a simple question on Banquo's part manifests as a multifaceted display of undifferentiation. For Banquo to neither "beg" nor "fear" a response from the witches, which is otherwise to neither "desire" nor "abhor" their answer, is a combination of stark opposites; similarly, Banquo's lack conviction over whether he would rather receive the witches' "favour" or their "hate" is equal instance of nonsensical undifferentiation. Further, when the witches, always remaining exemplars of undifferentiated language, hail Banquo as both "lesser" and "greater" than Macbeth, as both "not so happy" and "happier," the undifferentiation and category erosion is just as correspondingly apparent. When such a quantity of undifferentiation is present within such

a small number of lines, it is little wonder why Girard so gravely argues that “language itself is put in jeopardy” (Girard 51) when differences become indistinguishable.

The remaining example deals intimately with what may be considered the most infamous example of category erosion already explored in *Macbeth*. Indeed, such erosion, the complete loss of normative sexual identity, is a topic that has already been made eminently apparent by numerous scholars who have studied the text. Regardless, herein it is significantly less important to determine what constitutes “normal sexuality” in the play or whether certain characters seem indisposed toward the stereotypical gender traits of one particular sex; rather, the only language of sexual identity that bears any consequence is the language showing the undifferentiation of category erosion. Truly, it is as Girard contends: normative sexuality “is too trivial to provoke internal violence” (221), and as such its capacity for study is nonexistent in the realm of undifferentiation. The passage of Banquo’s language reads as follows:

—What are these,  
So withered, and so wild in their attire,  
That look not like th’inhabitants o’th’ earth  
And yet are on’t?—Live you, or are you aught  
That man may question? You seem to understand me  
By each at once her choppy finger laying  
Upon her skinny lip. You should be women,  
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
That you are so. (*Macbeth* 1.3.37-45)

In regard to the dynamic between interrogatives and statements of undifferentiation or category erosion, Banquo's language not only once again begins with an interrogative but is supplemented by numerous interrogatives more throughout his speech. Ironically, the language employed in his very questions resonates with undifferentiation. When he notes how the witches "look not like the inhabitants of the earth and yet are on it," he is unwittingly drawing attention to two aspects of the witches that blur them categorically. The first aspect is that even though they appear to be natural, they are in fact supernatural; and the second aspect is that, because they are supernatural, their presence in the natural world is improper. Supernatural beings should inhabit a supernatural world. Since the witches are supernatural beings in natural Scotland, their very manifestation upon the blighted heath is an irreconcilable show of undifferentiation. The notion is further perpetuated when Banquo asks the witches if they even live, and whether they are "aught that man may question." The very act viewing and questioning the witches as Banquo is doing implies the proper answer; and yet that Banquo does not recognize the inherent truth denotes his inability to accurately categorize the witches amongst the living or the dead, or the real or the unreal.

Most strikingly, and precisely in accordance with the language of sexual identity that bears consequence in the play, is Banquo's inability to determine the gender of the witches. In spite of his continued usage of the adjective "she" when describing the witches, Banquo is absolutely clear that he cannot refer to them as women because the beards they wear forbid it. Additionally, Macbeth, who remains silent until Banquo's speech is through, only further solidifies the categorical confusion by bidding the witches, "Speak, if you can. What are you?" (1.3.49), so that they will affirm their gender outright. When Macbeth

attempts to question the witches again soon afterward, he refers to them as being “imperfect speakers” (1.3.68), which is perhaps more aptly rendered into modern English as “incomplete speakers,” and which either way denotes the same appropriate sense of categorical erosion that renders the witches inadequate, half-finished, and distinguishably defective. Thus, while the text clearly illustrates the witches are beings quite unlike Macbeth or Banquo, the language of neither man is able to articulate as much; they cannot hope to render differentiation between themselves and the witches until the witches themselves are first rendered distinguishable.

If there is one thing Act 1, Scene 3 makes abundantly clear, it is that the witches in all ways defy proper categorical distinguishability. Such active defiance not only makes them paradigms of undifferentiation, but it helps to demonstrate just how “dangerous” characters who possess erosive qualities precisely are in a Girardian society. True to form, the final particularly fascinating aspect of the witches’ undifferentiation in the Scene both maintains their indistinguishableness and reveals their more dangerous side. Within the witches’ opening banter, the language they employ is indicative of the animal imagery seen in numerous other Shakespeare plays. While the Second Witch is busy “Killing swine” (1.3.2), the First Witch is planning to take the form of “a rat without a tail” (1.3.8) in order to punish a sea captain, the “master o’th’ *Tiger*” (1.3.6), because of his wife’s indiscretion. The ostensibly simple and all but forgettable nature of this event belies the glaring degree of undifferentiation and category erosion it presents. That the First Witch intends to actually alter her bodily form, for example, is exceptionally critical. As Girard argues, the “loss of distinction between man and beast...is always linked to violence” (Girard 128). It does not matter that the First Witch merely plans to torture the sea captain by keeping him

awake for well over a year (*Macbeth* 1.3.17-22), because the very act against him is intended to cause him harm without having a beneficent intention for society, and thus it is a form of destructive violence. Further, if the witches already exude a sense of indistinguishableness due to of their other qualities, then the ability to voluntarily change their very appearance only succeeds in adding a new element of undifferentiation to their characters. It is difficult enough to define the supernatural when it sees fit to remain in a single form; it is impossible to define the supernatural when it changes its forms. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the animal interplay in the Scene is additionally indicative of category erosion insomuch as the outcome of the conflict between the “animals” is unexpected. The Second Witch gives the First “a wind” (1.3.10) in order to assist the First in her foul purpose, and in that way the “swine” and the “rat” overcome the “tiger” in order to punish him; a more ludicrous outcome there is none.

If the descent into the realm of categorical erosion through the language of sexual identity is so easy traversable in regard to the witches, then Macbeth’s own descent is no more difficult to traverse. Like the androgynous hags, Macbeth is a character for whom most descriptive language is a gateway to undifferentiation. To that end, the sheer number of ways Macbeth is describable erodes any semblance of who he truly is in the play. Macbeth ultimately enacts the roles of the Warrior, the King, the Girardian scapegoat, and the enforcer of sacrificial rite, among others, and thus the very notion of a singular “Macbeth” in the play is a façade. Like the witches, he is shifting and multifarious, and while he may not outwardly alter his appearance as the witches do, his inward self is no less tumultuous. In regard to the erosive language of sexual identity, one finds that Macbeth is equally disjointed. While the play’s other characters present a serviceable depiction of



his sexual identity by utilizing descriptive language to draw out the undifferentiation that so fittingly revolves about his character, it nevertheless remains Macbeth's own forays into the space of self-description that stands testament to his disjointedness.

The greatest examples of Macbeth's self-description may be thought of as independent from one another, yet when brought together and juxtaposed appropriately, such descriptions show how undifferentiated Macbeth's sexual identity is in the play, and therefore how undifferentiated he himself is. Beginning late in Act 1, Scene 7, Macbeth endeavors to shield himself from the chastising of Lady Macbeth over his sudden spell of apprehension at finally being inescapably faced with an opportunity to murder Duncan by stating, "I dare do all that may become a man; / Who dares do more is none" (1.7.46-47). That Macbeth's language directly implies that one may utilize action to "become a man" is significant, as it is an idea he will reiterate shortly afterward in Act 2, Scene 3, once his houseguests discover Duncan's murder. In order to appease the shock of his guests, Macbeth's council is that they should all of them endeavor to "briefly put on manly readiness" (2.3.129). Once again, Macbeth's language suggests that an action—or at the very least what stands metaphorically as an action—is the gateway into a masculine disposition. With that in mind, it is then quite curious that in Act 3, Scene 1, the language of action takes a decidedly feminine turn in regard to Macbeth's self-description. In the Scene, when Macbeth is soliloquizing about his sovereignly insecurities, he notes how the witches have "hailed [Banquo] father to a line of kings" (3.1.61). In regard to another, the language of action is still masculine; Banquo is a "father" rather than a "mother" to a line of "kings" rather than a line of "queens." Yet in regard to himself, Macbeth states, "Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown, / And put a barren scepter in my grip" (3.1.62-63).

Now the language of action that Macbeth employs is wholly indicative of feminine impotence rather than masculinity.

What may thus be drawn from the juxtaposition of Macbeth's self-description is that he at all times wishes to utilize "action" as the catalyst for his own masculinity; yet action itself does not offer Macbeth the uniform representation of manhood that he seeks due to its own dual nature. Action may be masculine, but it may equally be feminine. Macbeth's language is able to denote the difference, but his actual character is never capable of acknowledging it. Further, the Girardian model considers Macbeth's reliance upon action a viable path leading to undifferentiation, specifically because it does not succeed. As Girard contends, "the representation of nondifference ultimately becomes the very exemplar of difference" (Girard 64). Since Macbeth does not possess the ability to tell masculine and feminine actions apart, his very purpose of utilizing such actions in an undifferentiated manner only succeeds in differentiating him from those individuals who may be considered his masculine peers. Men like Banquo, the "father" who begets "kings," or Macduff, who is a "man that's of a woman born" (*Macbeth* 5.8.14). In turn, since Macbeth is differentiated from his fellow men, he simultaneously becomes an undifferentiated being whose gender category is eroded once again. He is then in such a capacity as to be similar to the witches inasmuch as he appears as a creature whose sexual identity is indistinguishable; yet he is also then dissimilar to the witches, for while his lack of identity may render him an undifferentiated blur of a character, it does not have the power to render him supernatural. The application of the undifferentiation at work in this near-cyclical interaction of "same" and "not same" is quite rare in the Girardian model, and as Osborne suggests, is typically observable only in regard to a particular "example of

likeness, [such as] in twins or in marked similarities” (Osborne 337). Macbeth’s reliance on action is indeed reminiscent of such likeness or marked similarity. As such, whether his language is participating in the dynamic between interrogatives and statements of undifferentiation or category erosion, or whether it is alluding to his multiple roles in his own play as Warrior, King, Girardian scapegoat, or the enforcer of sacrificial rite by means of “action,” it will always be suggestive that there is no such thing as a single “Macbeth.” In this play, there is nothing more dangerous.

## CHAPTER V

Conclusion: “Be bloody, bold, and resolute”

That the scholarly community at large has not yet seen fit to usher the tragedy of *Macbeth* into the discourse of Girardian study as it has such other plays as *King Lear*, or *Julius Caesar*, or those of the *Henriad* is an unfortunate oversight, yet it is also a distinct opportunity. The thoughts and observations about *Macbeth* which have been herein discussed only constitute the foundational beginnings of what yet might be discovered and articulated about the play. By undertaking a literary expedition to uncover such knowledge, one indelibly sets out upon a quest to grant readers and scholars alike a new lens through which to explore the play that has until now been otherwise unavailable. René Girard himself began such an expedition first in his *Violence and the Sacred*, and later in his *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare*, in order to show how even the most seemingly harmless example of sacrifice in Shakespeare’s works can ultimately lead to dire consequences as those works unfold; yet for better or worse, Girard left *Macbeth* free of his insight so that it might now be deconstructed, investigated, and affixed to the concepts present within his sacrificial model by whichever kindred spirits deem the endeavor worthwhile. Consequently, then, if there is but one thing to be learned from the tragedy of

*Macbeth*, one lesson that might help gather momentum for further scholarship, it is a lesson that Girard so sagely intones: “The slightest outbreak of violence can bring about a catastrophic escalation” (30). Whosoever takes up the study of *Macbeth* would do well to keep such a notion in mind; and just as the prophetic spirit who grants counsel to Macbeth suggests the Black King be courageous and unyielding in his purpose, so too should all who would continue the work herein begun exhibit such tenacity of disposition as to be bloody, bold, and resolute.

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