Final Essay on William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth*

Choose one of the prompts listed on the next page, and write an organized and critical essay in response. You are expected to focus primarily on the play for your analysis, but you are also expected to incorporate at least one of the critical essays provided. There are a number of ways you can use the critical essay you choose. You might disprove it, support it with modifications, or address a portion of it. You may use more than one critical essay if you like.

Your essay will be graded using the British Literature essay rubric posted on Homework Central.

**Basic requirements:**
- 2-4 pages
- MLA format, including parenthetical citations throughout your essay and a works cited page (see below for extra help on the works cited page).
- Please note that if you have adjusted your formatting in a way that indicates you have not met the minimum page requirement (i.e. changing the margin width, font size or spacing), your paper will be automatically deducted or require a revision.
- Please note that if your paper does not meet the minimum page requirement, your grade will be reduced by a minimum of 5%.

**RIP List:**
If your paper includes anything on the RIP list, you will automatically be required to complete a revision with a penalty of 5% to your overall grade.
- Contractions (don’t, can’t, isn’t, wasn’t, etc.)
- Past tense verbs when discussing or analyzing a text
  - Use present tense verbs when discussing a text: Lady Macbeth is Macbeth’s wife.
  - Use past tense verbs when discussing events of the past: *The Tragedy of Macbeth* was written during the Renaissance.
- A paper that does not follow the classical structure for an introduction: *exordium, narratio, propositio, partitio*

**Works Cited**
The format below is correct for each possible source. Do not simply copy and paste all of them. Be sure that include the sources you reference throughout your paper. Make sure you put them in alphabetical order, as they are listed here. Any portions in red are those that you will need to change.

*Note that since there are not page numbers for the critical essays, you may cite as needed using just the author’s last name. Note also that because you are using the excerpts from this PDF, the works cited entries are somewhat condensed.*

Clayden, P.W. “Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.” 1867. PDF.
Biggins, Dennis. “Sexuality, Witchcraft, and Violence in Macbeth.” 1976. PDF.


Hugo, Victor. William Shakespeare. 1864. PDF

Irving, Henry. “The Third Murderer in Macbeth.” 1877. PDF.

Leggatt, Alexander. “A Deed without a Name.” Shakespeare’s Tragedies: Violation and Identity. 2005. PDF.


**Prompt Choices:**

1. Explain the role of ambiguity, contradiction, and/or role reversals in the play.

2. Macbeth seems to be very affected by the idea of manliness throughout the play. Consider the ways in which masculinity is defined or coded within the context of the play. Explain how this definition of masculinity affects Macbeth’s actions.

3. Aristotle would have likely deemed Macbeth as being too evil to be considered a tragic hero. Is Macbeth a monster, truly evil at heart, or does he have a conscience and a sense of humanity, brought to his downfall by a tragic flaw as opposed to an evil heart?

4. Explore the role of violence throughout the play. Consider not only violent actions, but violence in words as well.

5. Gender roles in early modern England were clearly defined and categorized. What we consider stereotypical today was the norm and the expectation in Shakespeare’s day. Does Shakespeare resist or support the gender roles of his time?

6. What does it mean to have humanity? What does Shakespeare seem to communicate about humanity?
An Excerpt from *Macbeth: A Deed without a Name* (2005)
By Alexander Leggatt
from *Shakespeare’s Tragedies: Violation and Identity*


Below is a passage from Alexander Leggatt’s essay “Macbeth: A Deed without a Name.” It is about the ambiguity and contradictions of the Weird Sisters.

The riddling language of the witches participates in—and since they begin the play may be said to trigger—the general uncertainty. Their paradoxes can be decoded: “When the battle’s lost and won” (I.i.4) and “Lesser than Macbeth, and greater” (I.iii.65) are riddles that do not require an Oedipus to solve them. “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (I.i.11) is a simple moral inversion, and when Macbeth echoes it in his first line, “So foul and fair a day I have not seen” (I.iii.38) he turns it into another fairly easy riddle. But the cumulative effect is that just as the body turns against itself in Lear, so words are set to fight each other, even cancel each other out. Macbeth’s first line disturbs us not by the particular riddle it poses but by the way it shows him participating in this general self-canceling of language.

[…]

The next stage after self-cancellation is that words disappear, as the witches do. In their charm “Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine” (I.iii.35) we cannot tell what they are talking about. There, a word seems missing; when they describe their action in the cauldron scene as “A deed without a name” (IV.i.49) a word is deliberately erased. At times, like the Ghost in Hamlet, they are silent under questioning, as they are with Banquo in their first encounter; they speak only to Macbeth. Then they reverse themselves, speaking only to Banquo; when Macbeth wants to hear more their response to his repeated questions is silence. On “Speak, I charge you” (I.iii.78) they vanish, as the Ghost did on a similar command.

… the witches provoke the question, “what are you?” (I.iii.47). A puzzle about their identity is built into the text. In the Folio speech headings they are identified only by number; in its stage directions they are witches, and for convenience I have adopted the general practice of calling them that. But that word is used only once in the play’s dialogue (I.iii.6). Elsewhere they are (with variations) weird sisters; that is what they call themselves (I.iii.32). (The adjective derives from the Old English word for fate or destiny.) In earlier versions of the story their identities are shifting and uncertain: they are variously wildly dressed women, goddesses of destiny, nymphs or fairies, women of striking beauty, demons in the form of women. Banquo’s questions are like the questioning of the Ghost in Hamlet, alternatives tried out against silence:

What are these,
So wither’d 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 lips: you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so. (I.iii.39–47)

Of the earth or not, alive or not, questionable or not, women or not: they inhabit a series of border zones, with something nameable on one side of the border and something unnamable on the other. Bombarded with questions, they say nothing about themselves, replying only with riddling statements about their questioners. The mystery deepens in the cauldron scene, when they refer to “our masters” (IV.i.63) and these masters turn out to be apparitions who rise at the witches’ bidding. Who in fact are the masters, the witches or the spirits? And what are those spirits?
An Excerpt from *Sexuality, Witchcraft, and Violence in Macbeth* (1976)
By Dennis Biggins

The consensus of critical opinion appears to be that sexuality has little structural or thematic importance in *Macbeth*. Thus, for example, a recent critic can refer to the play as "the purest of Shakespeare's tragedies," in which the Porter's remarks about drink and sex might easily seem incongruous.1 Some later writers, however, have drawn attention to a sexual element in the exchanges between Macbeth and his wife. Jan Kott remarks that Lady Macbeth "demands murder from Macbeth as a confirmation of his manhood, almost as an act of love," and that the "two are sexually obsessed with each other." Ian Robinson sees a perverse passion as the source of Lady Macbeth's influence over her husband in the murders of Duncan and Banquo: "the scene in which Banquo's murder is envisaged is a kind of love-passage between the Macbeths of which the natural consummation is the murder." D. F. Rauber comments on Lady Macbeth's strategy of questioning Macbeth's manliness in I.vii: "Her attack is saturated with sexuality, and her main weapon is clearly a kind of sexual blackmail: 'From this time / Such I account thy love' (I.vii.38-39).2 These are valuable perceptions, but they are mostly isolated and incidental to the critics' main purposes. It is my chief contention in this paper that there are important structural and thematic links between sexuality and the various manifestations of violence in *Macbeth*; moreover, that these in turn are associated significantly with Shakespeare's dramatized treatment of witchcraft.

The atmosphere of upheaval peculiar to the *Macbeth* world is partly created by Shakespeare's evoking violence in terms of sexual behavior and of the supernatural, both seen as perverted and disordered. This evocation is poetically appropriate: if Duncan (and, more equivocally, Banquo) represents the good with its potential for beneficent increase in a divinely sanctioned world-order, then Macbeth and his wife, who reject that order, are fittingly characterized in terms of the sexually aberrant and unfruitful.

[...]

The exchanges between Macbeth and his wife that lead up to Duncan's murder, tensioned as they are by an eroticism that is sometimes submerged, sometimes overt, but continuously present, culminate in the decisive act of violence, which is envisaged as a kind of rape. In one of the play's moments of charged proleptic irony, the saintly Duncan himself provides a bridge between the opening scenes' association of violence with sexuality and that of the later scenes presenting Macbeth's transformation into a murderer. He says to his welcoming hostess, of Macbeth: "his great Loue (sharpe as his Spurre) hath holp him / To his home before vs" (I.vi.23-24). Duncan is praising both Macbeth's loyal service and his marital devotion—his love for him and for Lady Macbeth—but there is a deeper significance in his words. They not only are unconsciously ironical (since we know that Macbeth has another motive for swiftness besides the ones Duncan gives him) but they also serve to develop the thematic link between sexuality and crime. Macbeth's "black and deepe desires" (I.iv.51) include murderous impulses that are "sharpe as his Spurre." The latter phrase is an image of sexual passion, as well as of ambition (as in "I haue no Spurre / To pricke the sides of my intent, but onely / Vaulting Ambition": I.vii.25-27).32 Macbeth has hastened home under a stimulus that is both keenly erotic and deadly.

When Macbeth balks at the consummation of his criminal desires, his wife seeks to urge
it by an appeal in terms of the same violent eroticism:

    Was the hope drunke,
    Wherein you drest your self? Hath it slept since?
    And wakes it now to look so greene, and pale,
    At what it did so freely? From this time,
    Such I account thy loue. Art thou affear'd
    To be the same in thine owne Act, and Valour,
    As thou art in desire?(I.vii.35-41)

Here Lady Macbeth explicitly parallels sexual action with murderous action. She appeals to Macbeth's sense of his own virility, in sexual terms. The metaphorical complexity of the passage leaves the reference of line 38 ambiguous: what is partly the contemplated murder, but partly also an intoxicated act of sexual passion, shamefacedly repented on the "morning after." Dover Wilson quotes the Oxford editors' gloss on such (l. 39): "so great in promise, so poor in performance" (New Camb. ed., p. 115). Lady Macbeth scornfully equates Macbeth's quailing from regicide with sexual nonperformance. The drunkenness and hangover images connect this speech with the Porter scene, where drunkenness is linked with lechery and with the impotence paradoxically accompanying the impetus one gives to the other. Macbeth's reply to his wife's sneer is "I dare do all that may become a man, / Who dares no33 more, is none." She retorts:

    What Beast was't then
    That made you breake this enterprize to me?
    When you durst do it, then you were a man:
    And to be more then what you were, you would
    Be so much more the man. Nor time, nor place
    Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
    They haue made themselves, and that their fitnesse now
    Do's vnmake you. ... (I.vii.47-54)

At one level of meaning Macbeth's claim refers to his injured sense of honor and noble manhood: "is none i.e. must be superhuman or devilish, which it suits Lady M. to interpret as subhuman" (Dover Wilson, New Camb. ed., p. 115). But at the same time there is a continuing undersuggestion of sexual potency and the proper natural expression of it. Murder is like an unnatural, or nonhuman, sexual act, as Lady Macbeth's further taunt also implies.34 Her do it (l. 49) includes the notion of coitus, although its primary reference is to Duncan's murder; vnmake (l. 54) likewise plays upon the double meanings "undo, unnerve" and "render sexually impotent."35 Building on her earlier soliloquy of erotic self-abandonment to the forces of evil, Lady Macbeth's sexual innuendoes invoking virility as a token of manliness now lead her into an appeal to her mate through horrifyingly violent images of a depraved rejection of womanly ties:

    I have giuen Sucke, and know
    How tender 'tis to loue the Babe that milkes me,
    I would, while it was smyling in my Face,
    Haue pluckt my Nipple from his Boneless Gummes,
    And dasht the Braines out, had I so sworne
    As you haue done to this. (54-59)
Macbeth's resounding acceptance of her challenge is appropriately ironical in its language of natural increase, motherhood, and virility: "Bring forth Men-Children onely: / For thy undaunted Mettle should compose / Nothing but Males" (ll. 72-74). His infatuation with her sees nothing strange in thus acclaiming such a tainted source of manly offspring.
Yet what does [it mean to declare oneself a man]? Clearly its meaning must be grounded in the context of the play in question, in the range of human examples it offers to us. But beyond this seem to lie two wider, concentric fields of significance: a code of manliness, the special virtues of the male gender…and wider yet, an ethos based on what best distinguishes the race [of humanity] itself, irrespective of gender…

One of the organizing themes of Macbeth is the theme of manliness: the word (and its cognates) echoes and reechoes through the scenes, and the play is unique for the persistence and subtlety with which Shakespeare dramatizes the paradoxes of self-conscious “manhood.” In recoiling from Macbeth’s outrageous kind of manliness, we are prompted to reconsider what we really mean when we use the word in praising someone. Macbeth’s career may be described in terms of a terrible progressive disjunction between the manly and the humane. In any civilized culture—even among the samurai, Macbeth’s counterparts in feudal Japan—it would be assumed that the first set of values is complementary to and subsumed in the second. But, as he so often does, Shakespeare exposes with memorable clarity the dangers of such a comfortable assumption: the more Macbeth is driven to pursue what he and Lady Macbeth call manliness—the more he perverts that code into a rationale for reflexive aggression—the less humane he becomes, until at last he forfeits nearly all claims on the race itself, and his vaunted manhood, as he finally realizes, becomes meaningless.
An Excerpt from William Shakespeare (1864)
By Victor Hugo

Victor Hugo (1802–1885) was a leader of the Romantic movement in France. The author of Les Misérables (1862) and The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1830) and many other works, Hugo also wrote a study of Shakespeare in 1864. The piece below was translated by Melville B. Anderson in 1887.

To say “Macbeth is ambition,” is to say nothing. Macbeth is hunger. What hunger? The hunger of the monster, always possible in man. Certain souls have teeth. Do not arouse their hunger.

To bite at the apple is a fearful thing. The apple is named “Omnia,” says Filesac, that doctor of the Sorbonne who confessed Ravaillac. Macbeth has a wife whom the chronicle calls Gruoch. This eve tempts this Adam. Once Macbeth has taken the first bite, he is lost. The first thing that Adam produces with eve is Cain; the first thing that Macbeth accomplishes with Gruoch is murder.

Covetousness easily becoming violence, violence easily becoming crime, crime easily becoming madness: this progression is in Macbeth. Covetousness, Crime, Madness—these three night-hags have spoken to him in the solitude, and have invited him to the throne. The cat Gray-malkin has called him: Macbeth will be cunning; the toad Paddock has called him: Macbeth will be horror. The unsexed being, Gruoch, completes him. It is done; Macbeth is no longer a man. He is no longer anything but an unconscious energy rushing wildly toward evil. Henceforth, no notion of right; appetite is everything. The transitory right of royalty, the eternal right of hospitality—Macbeth murders both. He does more than slay them: he ignores them. before they fell bleeding under his hand, they already lay dead within his soul. Macbeth begins by this parricide,—the murder of Duncan, his guest; a crime so terrible that, as a consequence, in the night when their master is stabbed, the horses of Duncan become wild again. The first step taken, the ground begins to crumble; it is the avalanche. Macbeth rolls headlong; he is precipitated; he falls and rebounds from one crime to another, ever deeper and deeper. He undergoes the mournful gravitation of matter invading the soul. He is a thing that destroys. He is a stone of ruin, a flame of war, a beast of prey, a scourge. He marches over all Scotland, king as he is, his barelegged kerns and his heavily armed gallow-glasses slaughtering, pillaging, massacring. He decimates the thanes, he murders Banquo, he murders all the Macduffs except the one that shall slay him, he murders the nobility, he murders the people, he murders his country, he murders “sleep.” At length the catastrophe arrives,—the forest of Birnam moves against him. Macbeth has infringed all, overstepped all, destroyed all, violated all; and this desperation ends in arousing even Nature. Nature loses patience, Nature enters into action against Macbeth, Nature becomes soul against the man who has become brute force.

This drama has epic proportions. Macbeth represents that frightful hungry creature who prowls throughout history—in the forest called brigand, and on the throne, conqueror. The ancestor of Macbeth is Nimrod. These men of force, are they forever furious? Let us be just; no. They have a goal, which being attained, they stop. Give to Alexander, to Cyrus, to Sesostris, to Caesar—what?—the world; they are appeased. Geoffrey St. Hilaire said to me one day: “When
the lion has eaten, he is at peace with Nature.” For Cambyses, Sennacherib, Genghis Khan, and
the like, to have eaten is to possess the whole earth. They would calm themselves down in the
process of digesting the human race.
[Lady Macbeth] calls to supernatural powers to help her to subdue the rising protests of her conscience, and school her better nature to submission. For that soliloquy clearly shows that hers was not a nature that was utterly without good, but that she had resolved to slay the good that was still in it. A man who feels no fear never whistles to keep up his courage. A man without compunctious visitings never talks about remorse. The utterly depraved never strive with themselves to put down their virtuous impulses; they have no such impulses to put down, no “compunctious visitings” to dread, no better part to scold into subjection. But Lady Macbeth was not utterly depraved. Her whole soul was on fire with ambition, and with a woman’s energy and wholeness of devotion she gave herself up to it. She shows all a woman’s wonderful self-control; but she must keep it up by using valiant words, living in public, and chastising her husband and herself “with the valour of her tongue.” She had a woman’s will, unswerving so long as it could keep on, but which once broken was broken for ever. It was now like a bow full-strung; but it was an immense and constant effort to keep it bent. She was afraid of her own nature. Had she been utterly unsexed, she would not have called on spirits to unsex her. Had she not feared remorse—which, indeed, did come at last and kill her—she would not have cried out to have the “access and passage” to it stopped by supernatural means. Had she not had eyes which could see the light, and some sense of Heaven’s watching eye still left, she would not have called to thick night to hide her, and to “the dunne smoke of hell” to shut out Heaven. This terrible imprecation is the expression of her will—not the ebullition of her feelings. It was indicative of a struggle. Her human, womanly nature was down beneath the fiery onset of her baser passions—throttled but not dead—held forcibly down, not slain and done with; and this language is the voice of her worse and baser part, scolding the better into silence and submission. The same thing is seen all through her character. She is not long before us, but she keeps up wonderfully. but it is emphatically what ladies call “keeping up.” It is far more “the valour of her tongue” than the valour of her heart which gets expression in her speeches. Her language is everywhere that of a woman who, in screwing her husband’s courage to the sticking place, as she says, is also screwing her own. That she is so entirely successful in screwing up herself and keeping up, is not at all wonderful. In this art women excel. They “keep up” through labour, and anxiety, and trouble, through pain and loss, and keep up till the need is over, and then break down. So long as the stress remains, and there is need to wear a brave front to the public, they show no sign of failure; full-bred, they keep on like blood-horses, who will drop upon the course. Lady Macbeth is a wonderful example of a woman of this kind; keeping herself up in hideous crime, showing herself always equal to the occasion while it lasts, but when the stress is over, breaking utterly down. Through the first act she is in her heroic mood, putting down her better self, and rebuking her husband’s weakness. but in the first scene of the second act she falters a little, and her words show that she has had recourse to a stimulant to keep up her courage, and that even then she can only do so by being perpetually busy.
An Excerpt from *The Third Murderer in Macbeth* (1877)
By Henry Irving

*Henry Irving (1838–1905) was a famous actor and theater manager. According to the Royal Shakespeare Company, his 1888 production “restored Macbeth as a serious and dark play.”*

There have been various theories and much discussion among students of Shakespeare as to the Third Murderer in Macbeth. It has even been maintained that Macbeth himself was the man, and that only upon this assumption can the difficulties attending the character be solved. Anyone curious to follow out that suggestion will find it discussed in Notes and Queries for September 11 and November 13, 1869.

A theory on this subject has struck me, which has not, so far as I am aware, been hitherto advanced.

The stage directions in Macbeth concerning one particular character (who, curiously enough, is not mentioned in the dramatis personae of any edition which I bear in mind) are minute, and I believe that, where such directions are so particularly given by Shakespeare, they are for a purpose, because he is generally careless about those matters, and leaves them, as it were, for the actors to carry out.

This character is described simply as ‘an Attendant,’ and what I wish to contend is that this ‘Attendant’ is the Third Murderer.

My reasons are as follows:—Macbeth utters what little he does say to this attendant in a tone of marked contempt—strangely suggestive, to my mind, of his being some wretched creature who was entirely in Macbeth’s power—not an ordinary servant, but one whom he might use as a tool, and who had no courage to disobey or withstand him.

Supposing this to have been the case, such a servant (from whatever causes), in such a state of moral bondage to his master, would be just the man employed upon the work of watching without ‘the palace gate’ for the two murderers whose services he had, by Macbeth’s orders, secured.

He need not have known the precise object of their interview with Macbeth, and I think it was probable, from the action of the scene, that he was not told of it until after Macbeth’s conversation (act iii. sc. 1) with the two murderers, at the conclusion of which, I infer, he was commanded to watch them.

Now the stage direction in act iii. sc. 1 is: ‘exeunt all but Macbeth and an Attendant.’ With a confidential servant, this is just what might happen without exciting notice. The words are:

Macb .: Sirrah, a word with you. Attend those men Our pleasure?

Attend .: They are, my lord, without the palace gate.
Macb.: bring them before us.

The tone of contempt is obvious, and also the fact that this attendant had been taken, to a certain extent, into his master’s confidence, with a sort of careless assurance of his secrecy. We learn that he has been just now on the watch for the two men, and presume that he had conducted them to Macbeth the day before.

The next direction is: ‘Re-enter Attendant with Two Murderers;’ when Macbeth says to him, in the same tone and manner,

Now go to the door and stay there till we call.

The attendant then retires, and is not recalled by Macbeth; but the action which I am about to suggest, and which the text fully warrants, would, if carried out, afford the opportunity for Macbeth to communicate to him the undertaking of the two murderers, and give him instructions to follow and observe them. If the attendant left the chamber by one door (‘Now go to the door and stay there till we call’) and the murderers by another, and if Macbeth used the former egress, the suggestion would be that at this moment, while he kept the murderers waiting, and in expectation of seeing him again (I’ll call upon you straight—abide within’), he went after the attendant and gave him his instructions.

By this device Macbeth gains the object which he has been seeking. He secures to himself a check upon the two murderers in the person of this attendant, who is made an accomplice, and whose lips are sealed. A very slight and legitimate change in the accepted stage-business would make all this stratagem clear to the audience, and it fits in with my theory that the attendant was a trusty, and not a common, servant. Had he been otherwise, the most momentous and secret transaction of the play would never have been committed to him.

Coming now to the murder of Banquo (act iii. sc. 3), we find that the words prove that one man is a stranger to the other two, at any rate so far as his privity to the enterprise is concerned. But the manner in which the Second Murderer satisfies the First that the newcomer need not be mistrusted strengthens my theory. For either the Second Murderer did not recognise the stranger at all, owing to the darkness of the night, and so distrusted him until he had delivered his credentials in shape of his intimate acquaintance with the whole place and scheme, or else perhaps they did recognise him as the attendant whom they had seen before; in which case also they would have been chary of confiding in him, as they had received from Macbeth no instructions to trust him in this matter. Indeed the instant reply of the Second Murderer, in order to allay the fears and misgivings expressed by the First, would favour the assumption that the stranger was a man they already knew, and who, up to a certain point at all events, was aware of their project. His further knowledge of the matter would be less surprising to them than if shown by anybody else, and he would thus be more easily taken into comradeship. except upon the theory that they had seen or known something of him previously, they would hardly be likely so soon to accept his mere word.

Enter Three Murderers.
1st Mur.: But who bid thee join us?

3rd Mur.: Macbeth.

2nd Mur.: He needs not our mistrust; since he delivers
Our offices, and what we have to do,
To the direction just.

1st Mur.: Then stand with us.

3rd Mur.: Hark! I hear horses.

Ban.: (within) Give us a light there, hoa!

2nd Mur.: Then 'tis he; the rest
That are within the note of expectation,
Already are i' the court.

1st Mur.: His horses go about.

3rd Mur.: Almost a mile; but he does usually,
So all men do, from hence to the palace gate
Make it their walk.

2nd Mur.: A light! A light!

3rd Mur.: 'Tis he!

The exact familiarity which the Third Murderer shows with the surroundings of the palace and the readiness with which his information is accepted by the others, suggest that he must have been somebody quite conversant with the palace usages and approaches. This familiar knowledge may very well have been another reason in Macbeth’s mind for connecting his attendant with the deed, if only by an after-thought, lest it might fail through the ignorance of the strangers as to the spot where they should post themselves, and other necessary precautions.

My theory would account for this familiar acquaintance with the locality on the part of the Third Murderer without recourse to any such violent improbability as that the Third Murderer was Macbeth himself.

It may now be considered what a difference in the usual arrangement of the banquet scene this supposition would make. We have no knowledge that it may not have been originally acted upon in the manner which I will briefly describe.

Think of the effect of the First Murderer being brought to the banquet-room by the attendant, and the latter standing by during the ghastly recital of the murder. If this expedient
were adopted, there would be no intrinsic absurdity in the appearance of the strange man at the feast. He might come there with a secrecy the more effectual because of its apparent openness, for he would be in the company of one of Macbeth’s chief retainers, with whom many of the guests were familiar, and with whom he might naturally, even at such a time, be obliged to speak aside a few words on some urgent and private matter. The conversation so conducted, even under the eyes, and only just out of earshot, of the whole company, might and would be no violation of probability, and need attract no special notice from the guests, even though the deadliest secret were clothed under the audacious but complete and natural disguise. But the effect upon the audience would be widely different from that of the present almost unmanageable tradition, which necessitates an improbability so absurd as almost, if not quite, to render ridiculous what might be one of the most thrilling horrors of the tragedy.