TOMORROW AND TOMORROW AND TOMORROW
2017

notes taken from HARVARD ENGL E-129

Table of Contents

FULL SOLILOQUY

(5.5.17 - 26)

MACBETH She should have died hereafter.
There would have been a time for such a word.
Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

GENERAL

- Macbeth's last soliloquy
    - This is the last time he shares his experiences with us before his inevitable death
        - He is mourning the meaningless of life after his wife's death
- To crudely summarise, this is a description of total blackness and despair that life is finite
    - Macbeth is expressing a sense of desolation of meaningless
        - Shakespeare may not be telling us that life is meaningless but he is showing the sense of meaningless that can come to someone who has betrayed himself, especially one who has betrayed his better self
- This is a speech full of contrasts between abstract nouns and concrete images; these images must be paid attention to, in order to fully understand the speech eg "candle, stage, idiot, "
    - To understand Shakespeare's language and writing, you must be aware of all the complexities of Shakespeare

LANGUAGE

- Seyton says: "The queen, my lord, is dead"
    - Macbeth responds with: "she should have died hereafter" - a short line, indicating, perhaps, that there should be a pause before proceeding to the next line.
        - If the actor takes the opportunity to pause here, they can capture the audience's attention before beginning to share his final thoughts with them
            - The pause may give the audience a chance to contemplate the significance of the previous lines by Macbeth and Seyton
                - The word "hereafter" introduces the future as an element of time

- It is also echoed by the Witches in 1.3.53, Duncan in 1.4.44 and Lady Macbeth in 1.5.63
    - The word 'hereafter' forms part of Lady Macbeth's first words to Macbeth and echoes the third Witch's prophecy in 1.3.50
        - In all previous iterations of the word 'hereafter', it is a reference or taken to be a reference to a future that is greater than the present; something to look forward to
            - But contrastingly now, it is a reference to bleak and meaningless future; it is a future that has been destroyed by foolish ambitions of the past and is now irrecoverable

There would have been a time for such a word.

- This line marks a return to regular blank verse
    - There is a stress on 'time' because this speech is about time
        - 'word' comes at the end of the line but it is used ambiguously here
            - We are not sure what 'word' Shakespeare is referring to: is it 'queen', 'time', 'hereafter'?
                - The next line clarifies which word Macbeth is talking about: 'tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow'
                    - The previous line is made up of purely monosyllabic words which forces it to 'trip' forward quickly onto the next irregular line, as if to reflect how Macbeth had been tripping forward up to this point, committing error after error until the inevitability of time catches up with him
                        - 'tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' has a feminine ending, emphasizing Macbeth's conflict with the future
                            - The pace of the reading has also slowed down dramatically, just as time may feel like it is slowing down for Macbeth as it draws to a close for him
                                - The repetition renders 'tomorrow' a nonsense word and it begins to reflect the lack of meaning that Macbeth detects in his own life.

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

- The rhythm is also beginning to 'creep'
    - The alliteration of the plosive /p/ appears to foreground the sound of someone plodding along meaninglessly and emphasizes the meaning of 'petty' as in worthless, or meaningless
        - Another instance of repetition in 'day to day' echoes the sense of meaninglessness established in the previous line and reflects the idea of being stuck in a cyclical trap of doom and gloom, from where there is no escape
            - In the previous line, there was a focus on 'tomorrow' and how it has become meaningless

- Now there is a focus on every 'day' or, perhaps 'to day (today)' and how each day has also become meaningless
  - 'day to day' also drives us forward 'to the last syllable of recorded time'

to the last syllable of recorded time

- This line is irregular and ends with a focus on 'time' once again
  - Critics have said that 'time' is possibly the most important word in Shakespeare and that he was often haunted by it
    - He often gave it a capital letter:
      - 'The inaudible and noiseless foot of Time steals ere we can affect them' – *All's Well That Ends Well*
        - Additionally, Elizabethans would have pronounced it with two (/tʌjim/) vowel sounds, rather than the one we do today
          - This seems to point to the idea that time can have two meanings
            - It can be understood in the conventional, factual sense, as in 'what's the time?'
            - But it also gives Shakespeare's writing an abstract and therefore, poetic resonance
              - Its power lies in its inexorability and its ability to erode human life and endeavor
                - It ends with death which is not to be avoided; Macbeth's soliloquy here resonates with his awareness of the inexorability of time and that his time as king and time of life is soon coming to an end
                - Time renders Macbeth's ambitions from earlier in the play meaningless
                - This view also helps us to understand why the play has been constructed to run at such a furious pace; to show that such uncontrolled and unchecked ambition will be quickly overcome by time and rendered useless

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

- This line returns to regular blank verse
  - Up to this point, Macbeth has spoken about 'tomorrow', 'to day' and now he is focusing on 'yesterday'
    - Macbeth is sharing with us, his awareness of the whole complex of time and not just of himself, but of all of eternity
      - Here, he admits, finally that the endeavours and actions of his 'yesterdays' we those of a 'fool'
        - However he uses the first person plural possessive pronoun 'our' to perhaps exonerate himself somewhat from blame, rightly or wrongly
          - However, it is ambiguous as to whom Macbeth is including in his analysis of 'all our yesterdays'

- He may be including us, the audience in his statement as a plea for us to consider our actions from the past
- Or he may be including Lady Macbeth as a reference to the foolish actions of their 'yesterdays'
    - However, the line does not end there; it carries on to the middle of the next line
        - 'And all our yesterdays have lighted fools /
          The way to dusty death.'
        - We have to carry on an understand it as a line and a half

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

- The phrases 'dusty death … walking shadow' recall the Order for the Burial of the Dead in the *Book of Common Prayer*: 'Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live … he fleeth as it were a shadow … Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust' (1599)
- There also seems to be an allusion to Genesis 3.19: 'For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou be turned'
- It also reflects the proverbial 'Life is a shadow'
    - 'shadow' can also mean illusion or phantom suggesting that life is an illusion, not real
- There is a pun on the word 'fool' as in an idiot and someone who acts a fool for entertainment, like a jester
- 'Out, out brief candle'
    - The last candle we see in the play is Lady Macbeth's candle in the sleepwalking scene
        - The stage directions in 5.1.18 instruct the following: '*Enter Lady Macbeth with a taper*' – a taper is a candle
            - The 'candle' is said to represent man's life and the human soul
                - 'Out, out' also echoes Lady Macbeth's 'Out, damned spot: out I say.'
                    - The echoing could imply that the couple had such a strong psychological link so that even when one has died, they still think alike
                    - It could also suggest that they suffer the same consequences, even though the effects are different
            - However, the reference to the 'candle' and the verbal echoing of 'Out, out' indicate that it is Lady Macbeth's death which he is talking about
                - She is the fool but so is he and so is anyone in the audience who is thinking of following a similar path to the Macbeths
                    - However, all human life can be likened to a 'brief candle'

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

- The term 'walking gentleman' is a phrase still used in the theatre today, meaning someone who is available in any company to walk on and play a meagre part
    - He is the lowliest member of a theatre company
        - But life, according to Macbeth, is not even a walking gentleman, he is a walking shadow – less than the lowliest player
            - This is a type of metatheatre as well

- Even though Shakespeare is talking about time, life and death, all of which are abstract nouns and concepts, he is using metaphors such as that of the 'poor player' to make these vasty concepts very concrete, particular and personal, not just to Macbeth himself, but to the actor who is playing Macbeth
  - This has the effect of drawing the audience into the realm of the play because they are aware that they are an audience and that Macbeth's character is relating his dilemma to that of a real player, particularly a 'walking gentlman'.

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

- This Is a regular line

Signifying nothing.

- The beats of the rest of the pentameter are not there because the end of the speech is total silence, total oblivion, total emptiness
  - The silence at the end of the speech reflects the silence of death and the eventual silence that will come with the end of time
    - This also appears to be a paradoxical reflection of his first, tortured soliloquy: 'With his surcease, success: that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all, here' (1.7.4 - 5)
      - In his first soliloquy, he suffers to rationalise the benefits of regicide and it is only two scenes after this that he gets the 'deed' 'done' and so begins his fast psychological downward spiral
        - His final soliloquy seems to be an acceptance and materialisation of what he knew all along, that 'all our yesterdays have lighted fools to dusty death… signifying nothing'
          - The reference to 'be all and '

Interestingly, the final words of each line add up to the subject of the speech

- hereafter
- Word
- Tomorrow
- Today
- Time
- Fools
- Candle
- Player
- Stage
- Tale
- Fury
- Nothing
  - A successful actor must have all of these complexities in his mind if he is to convey the full meaning to the audience
    - Therefore, it could be said that the devices and rhythms Shakespeare employs in his plays are not just for the audience, but also for the actors on the stage
      - If the actor can absorb the devices into his mind, he can express the meaning of the lines adequately

Literary devices

- **Metaphor:** Repetition of tomorrow is a metaphor for meaningless life.

Repetition: The world tomorrow has been repeated three times to create powerful effects.
Patterning in Macbeth's Tomorrow Speech
by Kevin Peterson
https://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~peterson/docs/macbeth.txt

Macbeth's Tomorrow speech makes recurring use of a device whereby a line or a sentence will contain a word or phrase with a secondary meaning which is not relevant where it occurs, but introduces a meaning which will occur later. Listening to the speech is an experience like a dream where the merest thought of something can cause it to expand and take over the entire dream.

The most natural reading of the first two lines of the speech, were they to occur alone, would be something along the lines of "It would have been better had she died later, as there would have been time to deal with it properly." The "a" before "time", however, suggests the alternate reading of "It was inevitable that she would have died at some point in the future." It is likely that both meanings would be active to some degree in the mind of the listener. This second, less likely, reading suggests the general tone of the speech, on the inevitability of death. The very word "hereafter" introduces the equating of temporal and spatial position: "hereafter" is after whenever is "here", but "here" alone refers to spatial position.

The phrase "petty pace" seems somewhat odd. It is not natural for a pace to be petty. Since tomorrow "creeps in", we must read "petty" in its meaning as "small", even though "petty" would in almost any other context mean "unimportant" or "trivial". Although the idea of triviality is not present in the line, it is brought to the mind of the listener by the use of the word "petty", coloring our understanding of the rest of speech in the direction of "life is pointless".

Note also that "day to day" sounds exactly like "day today".

Assuming we knew when "recorded time" was, what does it mean for something to continue until the last "syllable" of recorded time? This suggests that recorded time is composed of words. What words might it be composed of? "Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow" seems a good candidate. This is a bit of stretch, but consider I.v.56-58:

> Macbeth: Duncan comes here to-night.
> Lady Macbeth: And when goes he hence?
> Macbeth: To-morrow -- as he purposes.
> Lady Macbeth: O, never
> Shall sun that morrow see!

If Duncan shall never that "morrow" see, then the "to-" is the end. This seems like a very forced reading to a modern ear, since "morrow" has fallen out of use, and "tomorrow" is a single unit, but

it may have been more accessible to an Elizabethan audience. The image suggested by this reading is one of time ending at night, before the morning, which would add to the later idea of fools being shown to their death by candlelight and life being a walking shadow.

"Recorded time", would generally refer to something like "recorded history". While one could interpret "recorded time" to refer to preordained events given the speech's general feel of lamenting the inevitability of death, this interpretation is likely to be overshadowed by the association of "recorded" with history and that which has already happened. One would not normally refer to the "end" of recorded time, but instead to the beginning of recorded time. If recorded time had an end, the most reasonable point to place it would be right now, but the sentence as a whole has a pattern "the last ... of ... time" which immediately brings to mind the idea of the end of the world, the end of time.

The idea of "recorded time", as "recorded history" leads into the next sentence, that "All our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death,". Although "yesterdays" seems to refer most directly to something like "our past experience", but we cannot help picturing someone or something showing leading the fool to his bedchamber where he will die. "Way" could be read as either "manner" or "road", but the imagery of "creeping" and "pace" earlier suggests the more literal idea. This provides another example of the association of passage of time with movement in space.

"Fools" would seem to mean foolish people from the context, but it also has the meaning of a jester or clown, which will be echoed later by the player strutting and fretting, and the idiot telling tales.

"Yesterdays" completes the pattern of "to-morrow" in line 19, and "to day" in line 20. It would be interesting to look into how readily available the meaning of "enlightened" as "caused to understand the truth" would have been to an Elizabethan audience. To the modern ear, it's very easy to hear this as saying that by showing the fool his mortality, the fool is enlightened.

I am not able to read the speech without a slight pause after "dusty death". With this cadence, there is a consonance between "Out, out, brief candle" and "a walking shadow", the words "candle" and "shadow" connected by sound in addition to being connected by meaning.

The idea of walking toward ones death may be reinforced by the parallel between "petty pace", the fourth through sixth syllables of line 20, and "dusty death", the fourth through sixth syllables of line 23. Not only are they alliterative phrases in the same position in the line, but the alliterative consonants are both stops, the middle syllable of each is "ti:", and both end with unvoiced fricatives. This may also reinforce the idea of life's futility via the parallel between

"petty" and "dusty".

After such emphasis on physical movement and walking, the first thought on hearing the next two words, "out, out" is likely to involve a command that someone leave an area, but when the sentence is done, it has changed meaning to blowing out a candle. This is the candle that has lit the "way to dusty death", so with blowing it out, we would expect to see darkness, and in the next line, "life's but a walking shadow". The modern meaning of "shadow" would probably be initially the most probable, but when the line moves on to "a poor player", it takes on the wider meaning as well.

The phrase "struts and frets" for what life, the player, is doing with his hour on the stage, creates and image, at least for the modern listener, of someone being overly dramatic, unable to accurately portray an emotion and so forced to resort to over-acting to convey what he is supposed to be feeling. This suggests both the "sound and fury" of the "tale told by an idiot" in the next line, and the fool who is being shown his way to death. The player, who "struts and frets", would appear to be performing physical actions, but not necessarily speaking. Thus, it is somewhat odd to say that after the hour is up, he "is heard no more", but immediately after this, another image of life, as a "tale told by an idiot", is presented, which does involve speech. Indeed, we are explicitly told that it is "full of sound and fury". The final line of the speech, "signifying nothing" is the direct suggestion of life being meaningless, but it does not surprise. It has been set up by the "petty" of line 20, and by the general idea of life as a play beginning on line 24.

The equating of movement with the passage of time is a general theme of the speech, and words relating to both ideas occur frequently. For time we have "hereafter" in line 17, "time" in line 18, "tomorrow" in line 19, "day to day" in line 20, "last" and "time" again in line 21, "yesterdays" in line 22, "brief" in line 23, "hour" in line 25, and "no more" in line 26. Only lines 24, 27 and 28 contain no reference to time. Words related to movement occur as "creeps in" and "petty pace" in line 20, "way" (as road) and "out, out" (as "get out") in line 23, "walking" in line 24, and "struts and frets" in line 25. One could also include "lighted" in line 22.

In several places there are references to words or to speaking: "a word" in line 18, "syllable" and "recorded" in line 21, "heard" and "tale" in line 26, and "signifying" in line 28. Coupled with the image of life as a player in line 24, these may serve to make us more aware of the play as a play, rather than as reality, which may either ease our own discomfort at being told that life is pointless (because, after all, we are not players; life is no scripted for us), or it may heighten the seriousness of Macbeth's condition: he is

condemned to do exactly what he has done, again and again, as the play is written. It may do neither of these.

In addition to this form of semantic self-similarity, the speech has a great deal of less meaningful patterning which in general makes it seem more a single piece and more pleasing to the ear. The phrases "she should", "petty pace", "dusty death", "poor player", and "tale told" all alliterate. "His hour" does not alliterate in my pronunciation, but may for some. At least with modern pronunciation, the rhythm brings together "out brief candle" and "walking shadow". The rhyme between "yesterdays" in line 22 and "way" isn't as forced by the rhythm and may not be noticeable. "Struts and frets" parallels "sound and fury", and "full of sound" alliterates with "fury / Signifying". There is, no doubt, much more to be found.

Analysis

Prefacing this soliloquy is the piercing, carrion scream of Lady Macbeth. Macbeth responds to the scream stoically, plainly stating that while the scream, at some point in his life, may have startled and chilled him, it is now no contest to the “slaughterous thoughts” that pervade his mind as a result of his rise to power.

Macbeth then begins the soliloquy, after being informed that the scream was in fact Lady Macbeth’s dying exaltation. He begins, coldly, with what can be interpreted as “she would have died eventually,” but also as “she should have died later.” There is a hint of anguish as Macbeth utters, “She should have died hereafter;” which comes in at only eight syllables, shattering the traditional iambic pentameter rhythm and Macbeth’s character. The line does not run long; rather, it purposely falls short, much as Macbeth has in his aims.

This also ties into the fleeting nature of time, which Macbeth goes into in depth as the soliloquy progresses. With, “Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,” Shakespeare cleverly replicates the passing of time, most superficially with the repetition of “tomorrow” (a word which indicates time passing). A superfluous “and” is added to extend and draw out the line, too. It was not added for meter; rather, that “and” breaks the meter, which hints at its importance.

From here on, the diction and imagery that hint at time is stark. The collective tomorrows “creep in” at a “petty pace,” hinting at both lethargy and fruitlessness, from “day to day,” which, again, emphasizes time passing. Further, this plodding along continues “to the last syllable of recorded time” – we’re getting infinite in our futility, at this point.

With the lines, “And all our yesterdays have lighted fools/ The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!” the theme doubles down. The passing of time also becomes a metaphor for the passing of human beings, with diction and imagery to enforce this double meaning. As the progressing days run away from people, collectively, they look back on their past and realize it is all a brief journey towards death. Working with the notion that people come from dust, to dust they return, their past merely lighting their way towards death. Here there is an analogy between the journey towards death and the brief period one lights their way towards bed in the night with a candle. Of course, this “brief candle” is soon blown out, much as life is, as Macbeth calls for.

The metaphor extends as Macbeth goes on. Life becomes a “walking shadow,” evoking an ethereal, ghastly feel that is too insignificant or short to even be given full form. Life is a “poor player,” strutting about the stage with false bravado, all the while anguishing over the brevity of human life, as parallel to the player’s abrupt time allotted on stage, until it is “heard no more.” Again, life is not given form because it is too insignificant to earn it, and it merely troubles itself with meaningless trepidation until its time to shine is up, at which point it sharply ends and is forgotten.

Macbeth sums up the meaninglessness of it all, stating, “…It is a tale/Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury/Signifying nothing.” Macbeth stands before the audience bereft of solace and well on the road to perdition.