



HONOUR AND APPEARANCE VS REALITY

2023

Obsessions and Fears

notes taken from *RENAISSANCE DRAMA*: ARDEN SHAKESPEARE – BRINDA CHARRY

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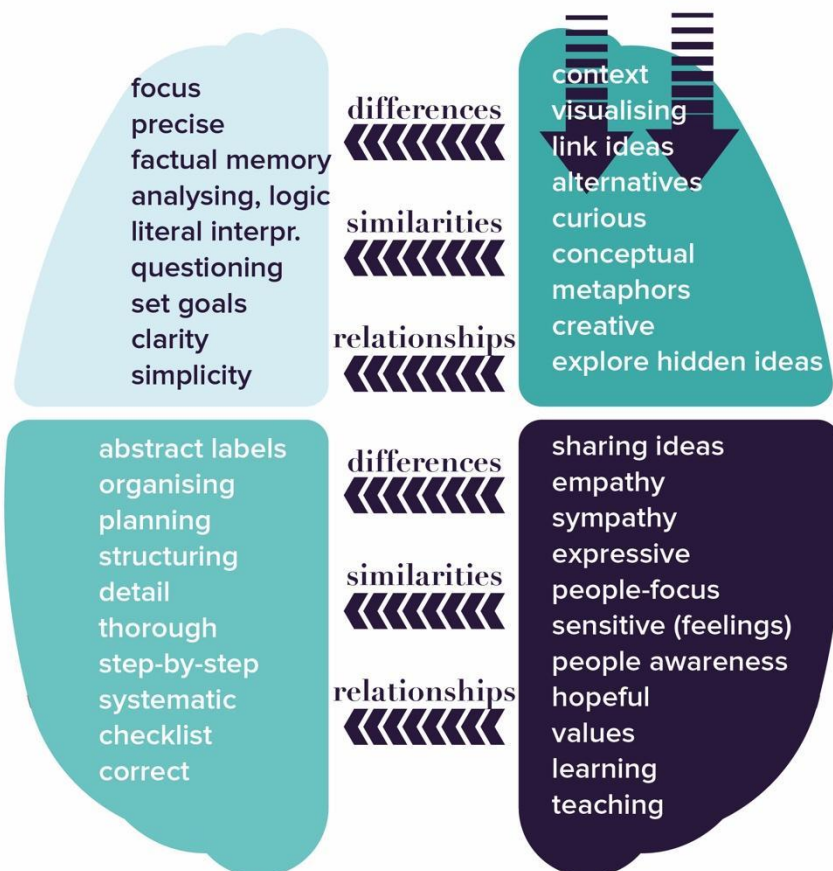




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RIGHT-BRAIN QUESTIONS FOR THINKING ABOUT CONTEXT

Whenever you read about context, you should try to ask the following questions

- Is this similar to something in the text(s) I'm reading?
 - o What is it similar to?
 - Themes
 - Ideas
 - Characters
 - Symbols
 - Scenes
 - Incidents





- o What's the relationship between the context and my text?
 - In what way(s) is it similar?
- o Why might the author have made that connection?

TEXT COLOUR CODE

- Background information
- Important information that links to text
- Examples

THE RENAISSANCE AND THE MODERN WORLD

Renaissance Europe represents one of the strongest influences on contemporary cultural heritage, however, it also constituted some profoundly antagonistic moral, social and political assumptions.

- In particular, an elaborate cult of honour had exerted a powerful grip on Early Modern Society and this is often highlighted in Shakespeare's plays.
 - o They smack of honor both. / Go get him surgeons DUNCAN (1.2.48)

WHAT WAS THE RENAISSANCE?

The Renaissance was a fervent (passionate, intense) period

- 'Renaissance' is a French word meaning 'rebirth'
 - o It was known for European cultural, artistic, political and economic "rebirth" following the 'dark' Middle Ages
 - Generally described as taking place from the 14th century to the 17th century, the Renaissance promoted the rediscovery of
 - Classical philosophy
 - literature
 - and art
 - o from the Ancient Romans and Greeks,
 - Some of the greatest thinkers, authors, statesmen, scientists and artists in human history thrived during this era
 - while global exploration opened up new lands and cultures to European commerce
 - o The Renaissance is credited with bridging the gap between the Middle Ages and modern-day civilisation.





WHAT WERE THE MIDDLE AGES?

Middle Ages, also known as *le moyen âge*, *media tempora*, *medium aevum* and, most commonly, *the medieval period*

- often seen as the period in European history from the collapse of Roman civilisation in the 5th century CE to the period of the Renaissance (variously interpreted as beginning in the 13th, 14th, or 15th century, depending on the region of Europe and other factors).
 - o This period is also described as
 - the “Dark Ages,”
 - the era is often branded as
 - o a time of war
 - When the hurlyburly's done, / When the battle's lost and won.
SECOND WITCH (1.14-5)
 - o ignorance (lack of intellectual and scientific progress, obsession with witches, etc)
 - o famine
 - o and pandemics such as the Black Death.

WHAT WAS THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD?

The beginning of the early modern is considered to be the end of the medieval period (also called the Middle Ages)

- this period is associated with a group of fundamental changes that occurred in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.
 - o There was also a decline in the number of people holding land under the feudal system
 - Instead of getting access to land in return for military service or unpaid labour, farmers paid rent in goods or money

RELEVANT PERIODS IN MACBETH SIMPLIFIED

- Middle Ages (medieval period): 5th century (year 400)– 13th/14th/15th (years 1200/1300/1400) centuries
- Renaissance: 14th century (year 1500) - 17th century (year 1700)
- Early Modern period: 13th/14th/15th (years 1200/1300/1400) centuries – late 18th century (around 1780)
- Jacobean period (reign of James VI and I): 1603 – 1625
 - o Macbeth and Shakespeare's other plays often incorporate concepts from all these periods.

THE ORIGINS OF HONOUR





Historians such as Keith Thomas and Mervyn James have discussed the distinctive features of the Renaissance concept of honour.

- A notable change of emphasis took place between the medieval period and the early modern era.
 - The nobility in the Middle Ages were under the sway of the chivalric movement, in which the feudal notion of military honour played an important role.

WHAT WAS THE CHIVALRIC MOVEMENT?

Chivalry, or the chivalric code, is an informal and varying code of conduct developed between 1170 and 1220

- It was associated with knights' and gentlemen's behaviours
 - The chivalric ideal, the behavior of knights, and how they were to employ these qualities, was somewhat more distinctive
 - Chivalric knights were expected to be
 - Courteous
 - speak well
 - and exhibit good manners
 - they were expected to use these qualities to
 - protect those who could not protect themselves
 - use their prowess, loyalty, and generosity to defend
 - clerics
 - peasants
 - widows
 - virgins
 - orphans
 - or people who were any combination of the above
 - The more defenseless, the better
 - Presented with the opportunity to leap to someone's defense, the chivalric knight seized the opportunity gladly.

WHAT WAS FEUDALISM?

Feudalism was the dominant social system in medieval Europe, in which the nobility (such as thanes) held lands from the Crown in exchange for military service, and vassals were in turn tenants of the nobles, while the peasants (villeins or serfs) were obliged to live on their lord's land and give him homage (special honour and respect), labour, and a share of the produce, theoretically in exchange for military protection.





MACBETH, THE MIDDLE AGES AND FEUDALISM

Macbeth is set during the 11th century

- right in the middle of the medieval period (Middle Ages)
- the medieval period was also feudal period
 - o the setting of the play is in Scotland, in the northernmost region of what is now the United Kingdom
 - at the time the play is set, Scotland was a separate country, although its proximity to England led to many struggles over who would rule the area.

WHO BECOMES KING IN A FEUDAL SETTING?

Deciding who would be the next king during the feudal period was a complicated affair that saw many competing claimants:

- Although the throne may have been passed down from one family member to another, as it is today, there were other factors involved, such as attaining the approval of the community.
- However, one of the most important ways to attain kingship was via military honour; In theory, therefore, it was the one who was seen as most honourable in society that made them feel they had a rightful claim to the throne
 - o One of the key ways to win honour was through success in battle, which appears to be one of the purposes of act 1, scene 2

Sergeant

Doubtful it stood;

As two spent swimmers, that do cling together

And choke their art... but all's too weak:

For brave Macbeth--well he deserves that name--

Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel,

Which smoked with bloody execution,

Like valour's minion carved out his passage

Till he faced the slave;

Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,

Till he unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps,

And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

DUNCAN

valiant cousin! worthy gentleman! (1.2)

- Here, we see Macbeth being praised for his bravery and heroics in battle by defeating the traitor Macdonwald who rebelled against Duncan by committing treachery against Duncan with the King of Norway
 - o this sense of honour is emphasised in act 1 scene 2 and sets Macbeth up as the next in line to the throne and seems to be confirmed when the Witches pronounce Macbeth with 'All hail, Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter!'





- But Macbeth's hopes are seemingly destroyed when Duncan announces his own son Malcolm as 'Prince of Cumberland', meaning that he will be next in line to the throne, completely foregoing feudal system of honour being the prime quality for kingship
 - Macbeth, aside reacts with anger:

MACBETH

[Aside] The Prince of Cumberland! that is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. (1.4)

- This is when Macbeth chooses to rebel against Duncan
 - This scene also raises questions about Duncan's sense of justice

WHAT WAS HONOUR? (PART 1)

Honour, in one of its meanings, is an exclusively social virtue

- It refers to one's reputation in the community
- To one's credit as a man of integrity
- To the honours or rewards which are bestowed publicly as a testimony to one's virtue
- To glory and fame which one acquires as the result of exceptional or heroic accomplishments
- Or to the good name which is gained when one consistently behaves in a fashion which wins the respect and esteem of one's fellows

WHAT WAS HONOUR? (PART 2)

Honour also refers to one's private and personal judgment of one's own...

- Inner convictions
- And actions
 - In other words, it relates to self-esteem as much as to public approbation
 - It is this sense of self-esteem that Lady Macbeth threatens in Macbeth when she says...
 - 'When you durst do it, then you were a man;'
 - However, Lady Macbeth qualifies Macbeth's sense of masculine honour against action
 - The alliteration in 'durst do it' serves to highlight the phrase, thus drawing our attention to the two verbs, 'durst' and 'do'





'DURST DO IT'

This phrase, uttered by Lady Macbeth, appears to allude strongly to Renaissance ideals of masculine honour

- 'durst', in this case, works as a modal verb which Lady Macbeth uses to question Macbeth's bravery, a key quality of the Renaissance ideal man
 - Thomas Elyot (c. 1490 - 1546), an English diplomat and scholar wrote that 'a man in his natural perfection is...
 - fierce,
 - hardy,
 - strong in opinion
 - and covetous of glory,
 - desirous of knowledge'.
 - The Italian author Baldassare Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) has been translated into English and outlined the skills every courtier ought to possess:
 - he had to be a soldier
 - and a horseman
 - and possess numerous other skills
 - Both Elyot and Castiglione include bravery as a necessary criterion of masculine honour and the implication is that bravery indicates a man's ability to act, in spite of fear and often violently in order to achieve honour
 - When we think of fear, we often assume it refers to the kind of fear that helps us to combat threats
 - In Macbeth's case, however, the threat appears to largely be with regard to his internal sense of honour
 - To combat this type of fear, one might have to go to an extreme by overcoming their own better judgment in case they mistake good judgment for fear itself and thus Renaissance drama often had men at the centre who took conventional ideals of masculinity to extremes
 - This is particularly evident in act one, scene two when the captain describes to Duncan how Macbeth 'unseamed Macdonwald from the nave to th' chops and placed his head upon our battlements'
 - Additionally, the verb 'do' suggests performing an action
 - Lady Macbeth's words appear to echo the ideas of Elyot and Castiglione by indicating that in her eyes, she can only accept him as a 'man' when he finds the courage to perform the action of murdering Duncan
 - Ironically, she uses the pronoun 'it' to refer to the murder which on one hand could simply reflect the real life sensibilities and possible heresy of talking about naming the deed of murdering the king on the Jacobean stage
 - On the other hand, it could suggest that she does not even possess the courage to say it, let alone perform such an action herself
 - She appears to confirm this when she says
 - Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done 't.(2.2.16)





LADY MACBETH DEFINES MACBETH'S MASCULINITY

There is a sense of irony in this situation because the Renaissance was a time where a man's honour was seen to be attached to the fidelity of his wife

- Particularly under the threat of cuckoldry
 - Shakespeare appears to have taken this idea to an extreme, in the sense that it is indeed Macbeth's wife who defines his sense of honour, but not in the manner that would have been expected during the Renaissance.

THE INNER vs OUTER CONFLICT OF HONOUR

Because this second meaning can be distinct from the first, it is possible that a man may paradoxically risk the loss of honour by failing to conform to the norms established by a given society which will win him the praise and esteem of his fellows in order to preserve his honor, i.e. avoid becoming dishonoured in his own eyes.

HONOUR AND NOBILITY

'Honour or nobility which the Grecians does call Eugenia, and signifieth liberal and good Birth, is nothing else but Gentrie, or the true title of Gentleman'

- Renaissance notions of nobility was complex and even contradictory, but it could be viewed from three essential perspectives
 - The first of these is based on the idea of virtue and moral worth
 - It places emphasis particularly on
 - outstanding and preeminent virtue
 - superior moral excellence
 - these are manifested by undertaking lofty enterprises,
 - civil or military, in the service of the state
 - The second results from the inheritance of noble blood from a long line of aristocratic ancestors
 - Finally, there is 'nobility dative'
 - The particular titles of nobility which could be acquired by the accomplishment of deeds of outstanding public service

HIERARCHY OF HONOUR INTRO





Renaissance moralists had a hierarchical view of degrees of social superiority in the social body

- They believed that those who belonged to the highest political ranks were the exalted elite of...
 - o Heroic men
 - Like Macbeth
 - o And magnanimous men of outstanding virtue
 - Like Banquo, Duncan, Macduff
 - It should be said here, though, that there is a question mark about Banquo and Duncan in terms of their virtue
 - o On face value, they seem like virtuous victims but on closer inspection, we start to raise some questions about them
 - And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose! BANQUO (2.1)
 - o However, the monarch, in theory at least, was both politically and morally supreme
 - Duncan

HIERARCHY OF HONOUR STRUCTURE

1. The monarch
 - a. Politically and morally supreme
 - i. For example, Duncan
2. The great lords
 - a. They were presumed to be...
 - i. High-minded
 - ii. Great-hearted
 - iii. Possess preeminent virtue which made them the heroes of the age
 1. For example
 - a. Macbeth
 - b. Banquo
 - c. Ross
 - d. Macduff
 - i. This presumption of the lords being high-minded, great-hearted and possessing preeminent virtue appears to be a cocktail of conflict because the monarch would rely on the powerful lords to contain their ambition
 1. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other. MACBETH: Is this a dagger soliloquy (1.7)

HONOUR IN A MODERN VIEW





Honour, in modernity, is often seen as...

- trivial
 - giving unreliable rewards
 - requiring too high a price to be paid for glory
 - or that glory may, particularly on the battle field, be won for actions not really laudable
-

HONOUR IN EARLY MODERN SOCIETY

The Early Modern Period experienced an elaborate cult of honour that exerted a powerful grip on society.

- For a woman, honour referred above all to her chastity, an idea explored in plays such as *Much Ado About Nothing*.
 - A woman's chastity was often seen as being represented through her talkativeness
 - Although *Macbeth* is not a play that focuses on the issue of chastity, Lady Macbeth's dominance over her marriage with her husband and her talkativeness in the early part of the play would have been in conflict with Early Modern values of male and female honour
 - Such a conflict would have tapped into male anxieties about losing face,
 - a particularly potent fear in a culture that was in the grip of notions of honour that regarded women as male possessions whose conduct reflected on men's reputation.
 - Lady Macbeth's control over the marriage, particularly in front of the other thanes at the banquet scene reflects poorly on Macbeth's social reputation, who, at the beginning of the play, was praised as a symbol of the much-desired male qualities of bravery and honour.
 - In contrast, at the banquet scene, he is portrayed as being led by his wife, lacking in control over himself and his marriage and weak
 - These qualities are the antithesis of ideal Renaissance manhood, but fragile and insecure masculinity was a convention of the Renaissance stage, which seemed to be questioning contemporary lofty ideals of masculinity.
 - However, it seems as though the root cause of Macbeth's dishonor is his desire to satiate his ambition, through any means possible, such as deception and murder, when he gives in to his wife's instruction to 'look like a flower, but be the serpent under't'.

APPEARANCE VS REALITY AND EARLY MODERN LANGUAGE





The Early Modern Period was one in which the debate about appearance and reality was raging

- Rulers underwent training based on Humanist philosophies, which in particular had implicit faith in the power of language and rhetoric to persuade people to do good and uncover truth
 - Eloquent language was seen as a sign of a cultivated society and a virtuous individual
 - However, the abuse of persuasive language for immoral ends became widespread, and confidence in the close relationship between eloquent speech and inner virtue was more and more eroded.
 - Perhaps the most drastic attack on the optimism of early Humanists was made by Machiavelli in his masterpiece *The Prince* (1515).
 - For Cicero (the Ancient Roman Rhetorician), the highest goal for a man was to enhance his honour.
 - The way to achieve this was through virtuous living.
 - Humanists strongly endorsed the Ciceronian emphasis on virtue as indispensable to a member of the ruling class in order to govern well.
 - Machiavelli shares the view that the most important good to aim for was honour and glory, but he differs radically about how to fulfil this aspiration.
 - The core precept, according to Machiavelli, was to adapt to the situation at hand. If this involved immoral acts, so be it.

VIRTUE VS REALITY

To rule wisely, according to Machiavelli, there was no necessity to be virtuous.

- The important thing was to maintain the appearance of virtue.
 - What counted was the image, not the reality.

CRITICISM OF MACHIAVELLI AND DRAMATIC REPRESENTATIONS

Machiavelli was endlessly vilified for his views and condemned as cynical and unethical.

- He was widely regarded as the source of the political principles he expounded;
 - his name became a byword for cunning and depravity.
 - A popular stage villain – a ‘Machiavel’ – emerged, who was a...
 - devilish,
 - unscrupulous schemer,
 - and combined elements of the cruel tyrant,
 - a favourite character in tragedies by the Roman playwright Seneca, with the comic devil or his henchman in medieval drama known as the Vice. The





'Machiavel' was a roaring success; Macbeth's final ally is Seyton, a homophone for Satan, depending on how the name is pronounced.

- In many ways Macbeth fits the representation of a Machiavel
 - His numerous asides and soliloquies give us access into his dark world of schemes
 - However, Shakespeare appears to adapt the characteristic of the Machiavel by using the soliloquies to make us aware of Macbeth's awareness of the evils is he planning to commit
 - The 'dagger soliloquy', in particular can be seen as a meditation on self-deception, as represented by the dagger which Macbeth says, 'I have thee not and yet I see thee still'.

I HAVE THEE NOT AND YET I SEE THEE STILL

This quote from the dagger soliloquy can be seen as Macbeth's acceptance of his own self-deception

- He accepts that the dagger is not real
 - And yet he uses it as a guide to, or 'spur' to murder Duncan

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

From Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince* (1532). Trans. Daniel Donno, 1966. (© Random House)

The Italian thinker Niccolò Machiavelli's famous political treatise *The Prince* (1532) was widely read across Europe. In this well-known excerpt, Machiavelli argues that a king need not necessarily be virtuous.

Generally, men judge by the eye rather than the hand, for all men can see a thing, but few come close enough to touch it. All men will see what you seem to be; only a few will know what you are, and those few will not dare to oppose the many who have the majesty of the state on their side to defend them. In all men's acts, and in those of princes most especially, it is the result that renders the verdict when there is no court of appeal. Let the prince conquer a state, then, and preserve it; the methods employed will always be judged honourable, and everyone will praise them. For the mob is always impressed by appearances and by results; and the world is composed of the mob....

LANGUAGE AND APPEARANCE VS REALITY





In the course of the early modern age, the initial enthusiasm for rhetoric gave way to an increasing scepticism about language (Ascoli and Kahn 1993).

- Ancient philosophers Socrates and Gorgias debated what the goal any practice should be for.
 - The end of all action should be the good, not pleasure, Socrates argues.
 - He lumps rhetoric with cookery, sophistry – a debased form of philosophy in Socrates' mind, which failed to strive for the good – and adornment.
 - All four skills might create pleasure, but it was far more important to instruct people how to be virtuous.
 - Instead, what these arts were concerned with was catering to our fondness for superficialities.
 - In the early modern period, the criticism of eloquent language was subsumed under a larger attack on pleasing exteriors as opposed to essences.
 - It gained a fresh impetus in the fiery polemic that circulated during the Reformation.
 - Religious reformers insisted that rather than an outward show of religious practice, it was one's inner feeling that counted.

ARTIFICIAL LANGUAGE IN DRAMA

Deliberate, patterned speech was heard from the pulpit and in parliament, but in drama it allied itself with plot and created a sense of suspense and pleasure.

- The language of drama was also not meant to be 'realistic' or 'natural' – stylization and artifice were desired and valued.
 - A play or a lyrical poem was after all a work of art, and this suggested 'artifice' –
 - a deliberate departure from the 'natural', which was often understood as being crude and unpolished.
 - The language of literature was therefore beautified deliberately and adorned 'cunningly' (artfully) and 'curiously' (with care and attention to detail); this is why iambic pentameter became conventional in Renaissance drama
 - Ornamentation was not an accessory or a superficial add-on – it was necessary to move and to delight.
 - Jonson deliberately distanced his dramatic language from ordinary speech.
 - 'That were a precept no less dangerous to language than to life,' he wrote, 'if we were to speak or live after the custom of the vulgar:'

BEAUTIFIED LANGUAGE AND DECEPTION IN MACBETH





It is interesting how beautified language was heard in parliament and in drama. In the context of debates about appearance vs reality

- Although the language of plays was even more deliberately heightened than that of parliament, they share a link in terms of dramatists' awareness of the artifice of this type of language
 - In the playworld of Macbeth, we see numerous occasions where Shakespeare alters the conventional iambic pentameter by
 - Adding syllables, for example in:
 - 'It were done quickly. If th'assassination' (1.7.2)
 - Here we have 11 syllables, which indicates a feminine ending, a deviation from the norm
 - Feminine endings indicate abnormalities by focusing on the word which creates the additional syllable; here it is the word 'assassination', a huge social and natural aberration.
 - Or changing the rhythm altogether
 - For example, Lady Macbeth's 'Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be' (1.5.14) can be read as 'GLAMIS thou ART and CAWdo AND shalt BE'
 - The stress pattern is unexpected but that forces attention onto certain words and emphasise the word be to naturalise the next step of the prophecy
 - Ultimately, the changes in stress patterns and sometimes the breakdown of language altogether such as in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene paint this heightened language as a type of disguise that is used to hide the characters' true intentions
 - That is why in places of intense stress, the patterns and beautification of language breakdown and resemble a lack of control, or the coarse language of the natural world, that artists were so keen to break away from
 - In a sense, this breakdown of language can be seen as a criticism of the use of rhetoric in politics and therefore paints it as a tool of deception.

HONOUR AND RANK

In a social world rigidly divided by rank, the well-born were assumed to possess virtues such as a distinctive sense of honour, magnanimity, wisdom and courage simply by dint of their noble birth.

KINGSHIP: EXCESSES OF POWER

Henry's speeches in Henry V are dynamic and inspiring as he appeals to his men's honour, patriotism and pride.





- But the treatment of war in Henry V is as complex as its treatment of kingship. The play indicates that war is a complicated affair. Not all soldiers are courageous or honourable; nor do all of them fight for the greater cause of the nation.
- the soldier Williams who meets Henry in the dark presents an articulate critique of war. He doubts if the cause they are fighting for is worthwhile and if death in war is as honourable as it is made out to be. 'I am afeard,' he says, 'there are few die well that die in a battle' (4.1.139–40).
- The guts and glory of battle and the king's speeches are more overpowering than this lone soldier's voice, but this juxtaposition of images of honour and glory in war with a more realistic and critical perspective is an interesting one, with one point of view undercutting and complicating the other.
- Mariam (In The Tragedy of Mariam), who has been accused of speech that is unrestrained and too frank, turns to silence at the end. But her silence too is a form of protest as she goes to her death with 'a dutiful, though scornful smile' (5.1.52). She dies a stoic, martyr-like death, so garnering for herself masculine honour and glory.
- In spite of this, there is something admirable about the boldness with which Salome rejects conventional notions of women's shame and dishonour – 'Shame is gone and honour wiped away' (1.4.33)
- Salome will not passively accept her position under patriarchal law. She says that she will 'be the custom-breaker and begin / To show my sex the way to freedom's door' (1.4.49–50). She remains defiant even as her husband, Constabarus, accuses her of dishonouring her name, race and husband and of dangerously rebelling: 'Are Hebrew women now transformed to men?' he asks, and is disturbed at the prospect of a world 'topsyturned quite!' (1.6.47, 50).

HONOUR AND CLOTHES

'Why do you dress me/ In borrow'd robes?' (1.4.108–9) asks Macbeth, when he is given the title of a man he knows to be still living, a 'prosperous gentleman' (1.4.73), and he develops the imagery as he tries to resist Lady Macbeth's implacable resolve: 'I have bought/ Golden opinions from all sorts of people,/ Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,/ Not cast aside so soon' (1.7.31–4). Lady Macbeth picks up the threat: 'Was the hope drunk/ Wherein you dressed yourself?' (1.7.35–6). But others use the same trope. Banquo explains Macbeth's distraction: 'New honours come upon him/ Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould/ But with the aid of use' (1.3.145–7).

MACBETH'S SENSE OF HONOUR

The moral sense which makes Macbeth acutely conscious of Duncan as a good man and a king to whom he owes compelling duties never leaves him.

- He wants to...
 - o be part of an ordered society,
 - o to enjoy the 'golden opinions' which he has won through service to the state
 - o and to share them with his 'dearest partner of greatness',
 - o to 'live the lease of nature, pay his breath / To time, and mortal custom' (4.1.98–9), only dying after an old age accompanied by 'honour, love, obedience, troops of friends' (5.3.25).





- He allows himself to become a murderer but is filled with horror at what he has done and at once wishes it undone, recognizing that through the deed he has irrevocably corrupted a sacramental part of his innermost self
 - ('Put rancours in the vessel of my peace ... and mine eternal jewel / Given to the common enemy of man' (3.1.66–8)).

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