



# QUOTES ABOUT HONOUR

## 2023

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

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## THE RENAISSANCE, THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD & HONOUR

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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.
    - They smack of honor both. / Go get him surgeons DUNCAN (1.2.48)
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## HONOUR IN EARLY MODERN SOCIETY

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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

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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.

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## VIRTUE VS REALITY

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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.

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## CRITICISM OF MACHIAVELLI AND DRAMATIC REPRESENTATIONS

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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'.

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## NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

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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....

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## MACBETH'S SENSE OF HONOUR

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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...
  - be part of an ordered society,
  - to enjoy the 'golden opinions' which he has won through service to the state
  - 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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## ACT 1 QUOTES

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O valiant cousin, Worthy gentleman (1.2.26)

The worthy Thane of Ross (1.2.50)

Yes, as sparrows eagles, or the hare lion (1.2.39)

See, see our honoured hostess!

The love that follows us sometimes in our troubles (1.6.13)

We will proceed no further in this business.

He hath honoured me of late, and I have bought golden opinions from all sorts of people. (1.7.34)

They smack of honor both.

Go get him surgeons (1.2.48)

Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter

The Prince of Cumberland; which honor must

Not unaccompanied invest him only,

But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine

On all deservers. (1.4.44)

When you durst do it, then you were a man;

And to be more than what you were, you would

Be so much more the man (1.7.56)

Was the hope drunk

Wherein you dressed yourself?

Hath it slept since? (1.7.40)

Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life

And live a coward in thine own esteem (1.7.46)

We fail?





But screw your courage to the sticking place  
And we'll not fail (1.7.69)

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## ACT 2 QUOTES

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If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,  
It shall make honor for you.(2.1.34)

Had he not resembled  
My father as he slept, I had done 't.(2.2.16)

This is a sorry sight(2.2.28)

I'll go no more.  
I am afraid to think what I have done.  
Look on 't again I dare not.(2.2.65)

My hands are of your color, but I shame  
To wear a heart so white.(2.2.82)

'Tis unnatural,  
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last  
A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place,  
Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed.(2.4.13)

And Duncan's horses (a thing most strange and  
certain),  
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,  
Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,  
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would  
Make war with mankind.(2.4.17)

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