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麦克佩斯

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序 言

莎士比亚是中国读者和观众都非常熟悉的一个名字。虽然这位世界著名的戏剧大师的名字已在 19 世纪中叶中国出版的书刊上出现,但是他的作品直到本世纪初才被介绍给中国的读者。1903 年,英国作家兰姆兄妹的《莎士比亚戏剧故事集》第一次被译成中文,其中十个故事的文言译文被编成一个集子,题名为《瀛外奇谈》;次年,商务印书馆又出版了林纾翻译的同一本故事集的全译本,定名为《吟边燕语》。而直到 1921 年,莎士比亚的第一个剧本(《哈姆雷特》)才被田汉完整地译成中文。至今,他的全部剧作已为中国读者所熟悉,每一个剧目起码有两个以上的中译本。

70 年代末以来,中国的莎学发展很快。1984 年 12 月,中国莎士比亚研究会正式宣告成立,并在北京和上海组织了 1986 年和 1994 年两届莎士比亚戏剧节。许多大学的英文系和中文系都把莎士比亚戏剧列为专业必修或专业选修课。莎士比亚已成为深受中国广大读者喜爱的外国作家。曹禺先生在 1984 年为中国莎学会会刊《莎士比亚研究》所写的发刊词中的一段话极好地描述了莎士比亚在中国读者心目中的地位:

“有史以来,屹立在高峰之上,多少文学巨人们教给人认识自己,开阔人的眼界,丰富人的贫乏生活,使人得到智慧、得到幸福、得到享受,引导人懂得‘人’的价值、尊严和力量。莎士比亚就是这样一位使人类永久又惊又喜的巨人。”

莎士比亚生活在 16 世纪下半叶和 17 世纪初的英国,即英国文艺

复兴时期的鼎盛阶段,前后经历了英国的两代君主:伊丽莎白女王和詹姆士一世。对于剧作家生平的史料我们掌握得很少,这是因为在他所生活的那个年代人们并不注重保存有关个人的资料,特别是像莎士比亚这样一个并不属于王室、宫廷和教会的戏剧界人士,更得不到当代人的关注。因此,我们至今仍没有一部可靠的莎士比亚传记,对于他生平和创作生涯的许多细节都只有通过他的作品和我们对那个时代的了解去推测。

莎士比亚出生在英国沃里克郡埃文河上的斯特拉特福镇。关于他早年的生活仅有两条记录,那就是保存在斯特拉特福镇圣三一教堂有关他洗礼和婚约的记载。根据记载,威廉·莎士比亚于1564年4月26日接受洗礼。按当时的习俗,婴儿出生后应尽早受洗,由此英国学者推断他的出生日期为4月23日。而这种推论的原因之一是五十二年后(1616年)他的忌辰恰恰是4月23日。

莎士比亚的父亲是当地的皮手套工匠,还兼营谷物、羊毛和皮革的买卖,先后担任过镇上的多项公职。莎士比亚四岁那年,他当选为市政委员会执行官,即镇长。作为长子,莎士比亚可能就读于当地的文法学校。十三岁时家道中落,年轻的莎士比亚可能不得不放弃学业,跟着父亲学手艺,以弥补家用。1582年,年仅十八岁的莎士比亚与邻村农户的女儿安·哈瑟维结婚,安比威廉大八岁。次年,他们的长女苏姗娜出生;1585年,一对双胞胎又降临人间。在此后的七年间,我们没有任何有关莎士比亚的记载。但有一点是可以肯定的,那就是在此期间他离开了家乡,到伦敦去谋生,并加入了剧团,开始了他的戏剧生涯。

有关莎士比亚的下一个记载始于1592年。从当时著名的剧作家罗伯特·格林的一篇文章中可以看出莎士比亚在1592年间已在伦敦舞台上颇具名望。在这篇名为“百万的忏悔换取的一先令的智慧”的文章中,被誉为“大学才子”之一的格林借用莎士比亚剧中的台词来攻击他是“一只暴发户式的乌鸦”,“用我们的羽毛装点了起来,用一件演员的外衣包起了他的虎狼之心”。从这篇醋意十足的文章中可以看到莎士比亚于90年代初已在伦敦的戏剧界站稳了脚跟,但他加盟后来被称为“宫廷大臣剧团”的具体时间却无从推断。

莎士比亚发表的第一部作品是他的一首长诗《维纳斯与阿多尼斯》(1593年)。在他二十多年的创作生涯中,他一共写了两首长诗、一百五十四首十四行诗和三十七部剧本。与同代人相比,莎士比亚几乎把他的全部精力都放在戏剧创作之上,他的长诗和十四行诗都是在瘟疫流行、伦敦剧场关闭、剧团不需要新剧目期间写成的。

英国的戏剧起源于中世纪教堂的礼拜仪式。当时的弥撒中有表演动作的对话性轮唱,这就是英国早期戏剧的雏型。后来,这种表演形式逐步世俗化,也慢慢走出了教堂,发展成为以圣经故事和圣徒事迹为主的奇迹剧和以宣传教义、进行道德劝诫为目的的道德剧。直到16世纪中叶伊丽莎白女王登基,这些中世纪的戏剧形式仍在英国流行。当时的英国戏剧尚没有固定的演出场所,一队队云游四方的戏子常在客栈的院子里或达官贵人的宅邸搭起临时的舞台。直到1576年,伦敦才有了第一座专供戏剧演出的建筑,起名为“剧场”,职业戏剧演员才开始在英国戏剧的发展过程中发挥出他们的作用。但是,英国文艺复兴时期戏剧的变革直到1587年克里斯托弗·马洛的《贴木尔》被搬上舞台才拉开了序幕。马洛、托马斯·基德、约翰·黎里和格林奠定了英国“新戏剧”的基础,而莎士比亚的三十七个剧在很大程度上则代表了英国文艺复兴时期“新戏剧”的最高成就。

莎士比亚戏剧的创作年代现在已经无从考证,甚至连这些剧本的创作顺序也无案可查。现有的记载仅仅能够显示向政府注册登记的出版日期和剧场演出的记录。在1623年出版的第一对开本中,莎士比亚戏剧被划分成喜剧、历史剧和悲剧三大类,而我们今天通常在这三类剧种之后再加上一个类别——传奇剧(又称悲喜剧),专指莎士比亚创作生涯后期的几个剧目。

对于莎士比亚戏剧发展阶段的划分西方学者也颇有争议。现在比较流行的一种说法是根据他的艺术技巧的发展和莎剧的情调把他的戏剧创作生涯划分成四个阶段:(1)早期抒情时期;(2)历史剧和喜剧时期;(3)悲剧时期;(4)传奇剧或悲喜剧时期。

第一阶段包含了三个喜剧——《错误的喜剧》、《爱的徒劳》、《维洛那二绅士》;还有历史剧《亨利六世》(上、中、下篇)和悲剧《泰特斯·安德

洛尼克斯》。作为一名年轻的剧作家,这是莎士比亚的试笔阶段,或曰他的学徒期。有一部分人认为,这个时期莎士比亚的主要工作是改写原有的剧本,但是作为戏剧界的一名新手,又怎么可能承担起改编原有剧本的任务呢?应该说,这一时期莎士比亚的主要精力放在学习当时英国舞台流行的不同剧种之上:《错误的喜剧》是移植古典喜剧的典型例子;《亨利六世》显然受到马洛历史剧的影响;《泰特斯·安德洛尼克斯》是模仿基德开创的复仇悲剧的一个并不十分成功的例子。而在《爱的徒劳》和《维洛那二绅士》这两个喜剧中,我们则看到了剧作家对新剧种的一种尝试:前者属于浪漫喜剧,后者含有讽刺喜剧的不少要素。

第二阶段创作的历史剧有:《约翰王》、《理查三世》、《理查二世》、《亨利四世》(上、下篇)和《亨利五世》。还有《仲夏夜之梦》、《威尼斯商人》、《驯悍记》、《温莎的风流娘儿们》、《无事生非》、《皆大欢喜》、《第十二夜》等七个喜剧和悲剧《罗密欧与朱丽叶》。现代观众并不欣赏的历史剧在16世纪90年代走红并不是偶然的,原因不外乎两个方面:政治的需要和文学传统的影响。自亨利七世于1485年继承英国王位之后,为了巩固都铎王朝的统治,英国的君主提倡和鼓励在文学作品中宣传代表兰开斯特家族的亨利七世与约克家族的联姻最终结束了长达三十年的英国内战这一历史事件,并将此说成是上天的旨意,而亨利七世和他的继承人则被称作是6世纪英国亚瑟国王的化身。在由此而流行起来的历史题材文学作品中,历史被看成是历史事实的一种积聚,这些历史事件不仅会重复发生,而且能够从中预测未来,因此对人们有一定的教育意义。历史剧在莎士比亚的笔下达到了其发展过程的顶峰。其中的八部集中展现了英国14至15世纪百余年间的重大史实,带有浓厚的政治色彩,也反映了16世纪后期的道德观。这一时期的喜剧以浪漫喜剧为主,这种喜剧形式与风行于16世纪下半叶的欢乐明快的田园诗不无关系。虽然黎里和格林可以被称作浪漫喜剧的奠基人,但最终还是莎士比亚创作了堪称浪漫喜剧典范的几部剧作:《仲夏夜之梦》、《无事生非》、《皆大欢喜》和《第十二夜》。连这一时期的悲剧《罗密欧与朱丽叶》似乎也深受浪漫主义情调的影响。与第三阶段的悲剧相比,《罗密欧与朱丽叶》缺乏深度,也缺乏后期悲剧那种催人泪下的强大感召力,

它留给观众和读者最深的印象是一对青年男女之间纯真的爱情,是他们在一起短暂的幸福时刻。

第三阶段以莎士比亚的四大悲剧——《哈姆雷特》、《奥赛罗》、《李尔王》和《麦克佩斯》——为主,同期的悲剧还有《尤里乌斯·凯撒》、《雅典的泰门》、《安东尼和克莉奥佩特拉》和《科里奥拉努斯》。应该说,经过前两个阶段的准备,莎士比亚的戏剧艺术在这一时期达到了巅峰。如果说《尤里乌斯·凯撒》还是历史剧和悲剧相结合的产物的话,那么在《哈姆雷特》中莎士比亚的全部注意力则集中在悲剧人物的塑造和悲剧气氛的烘托上了。莎士比亚的四大悲剧标志着英国悲剧发展的新阶段。在这几个剧中,造成主人公悲剧下场的不再是命运或其它外界的力量,而主要是他们各自独特的性格。剧作家对悲剧主人公精辟的剖析反映了人文主义思想对莎士比亚的影响。这种人物塑造和剖析使他的悲剧获得了深刻的内涵,也是赋予这四大悲剧持久生命力的主要原因。在这一时期,莎士比亚还推出了三个喜剧:《终成眷属》、《一报还一报》和《特洛伊罗斯与克瑞西达》。这几个剧与前期的浪漫喜剧形成了鲜明的对比。虽然剧中的主题仍是爱情与婚姻,但这里已没有丝毫明快的气氛,我们看到的只是伪善、背叛、腐败等社会阴暗面。虽然每个剧都有一个喜剧性的结尾,但故事的结局却很难使观众和读者感到满意。因此,这几个剧常被称作“阴暗喜剧”或“问题剧”。这大概就是悲剧时期剧作家创作的喜剧的特点吧。

最后一个阶段包含了四个传奇剧——《泰尔亲王佩里克利斯》、《辛白林》、《冬天的故事》、《暴风雨》以及一个历史剧《亨利八世》。在这一时期,莎士比亚的戏剧艺术已经失去了原有的锋芒,剧作家的注意力似乎更多地放在迎合当时观众的口味上。剧本更多地强调曲折离奇的情节,而缺乏对于人生或社会问题的分析。由于剧中的故事常以悲剧情节开头,转而实现恶人忏悔、好人昭雪、失而复得的大团圆结局,因此,后期的传奇剧也常被称作悲喜剧。

1612年,莎士比亚结束了他的创作生涯,离开伦敦,返回他的故乡斯特拉特福镇,住进他于1597年购得的镇上第二大住宅——“新居”。1616年4月23日,这位著名的诗人、剧作家与世长辞。他被安葬在镇

上的圣三一教堂内,墓石上刻着这样几句话:

“看在耶稣基督的份上请住手,
切勿挖掘这片墓石下的尸骨。
谁在这里动土将受到诅咒,
谁尊重我的遗体将会得到祝福。”

莎士比亚并没有为后人留下一个庞大的家族,他的子女不是终身不育就是早年丧子。到了17世纪中叶,威廉和安以及他们的子女都已先后过世。然而,莎士比亚留给我们的却是他那些不朽的著作。1623年,他的三十六个剧本第一次被收集成册,这就是著名的第一对开本。在为第一对开本所写的题辞中,莎士比亚的同代诗人和剧作家本·琼森称他为“时代的灵魂”,并宣称:“他不属于一个时代而属于所有的世纪。”

何其辛

Macbeth: A play for the king

When Elizabeth I of England was dying, childless, she named James VI of Scotland as her successor. He became James I of England.

In August 1606 James was at Hampton Court, a palace near London, entertaining his brother-in-law, King Christian of Denmark. A play was acted for them, *Macbeth*, written by the best dramatist of the time, William Shakespeare. It was a new play, but the story was an old one. James knew it well, because it was about ancestors, Banquo and Fleance, through whom he had inherited the throne of Scotland.

Shakespeare found the story in *The History of Scotland*, by Raphael Holinshed, but his play is much more than a dramatic re-writing of the historical facts. He made many changes, and the biggest of these concerned James's ancestor. In the true story, Banquo joined Macbeth in killing Duncan; but clearly it would be tactless to suggest that James was descended from a regicide—the murderer of a king. So Shakespeare's Banquo is innocent.

James also believed that he was descended spiritually from the long tradition of English monarchs, and that he had inherited the power of healing that Edward the Confessor (1042–66) possessed. Shakespeare's description of this power (4, 3, 146–56) is, to some extent, deliberate flattery of his king. Shakespeare also knew that James was extremely interested in witchcraft, and had written a book about it.

Macbeth is certainly a play 'fit for a king'.

But of course it is more than this—more than flattery for an ancient British monarch; and although the story is largely true, we do not read *Macbeth* as 'history'. We could interpret Shakespeare's play as a moral lesson. Macbeth murders his king. To murder any man is a crime, but those who lived at the time of Shakespeare thought that the murder of a *king* was the greatest of all crimes. Kings were appointed by God, to rule as His deputies: rebellion against a true king was rebellion against God. By murdering Duncan, Macbeth gains the crown; but he loses love, friendship, respect—and in the end his life. His crime is rightly punished.

There is still more to the play. On one 'level' it is royal entertainment—and entertainment, too, for all those of us who

enjoy the suspense and excitement of a murder story. On another level, it teaches us, in a new way, the old lesson that crime does not pay. But there are two more levels.

As we look at the character of Macbeth we see, more clearly than we are able to see in real life, the effects of uncontrolled ambition on a man who is, except for his ambition, noble in nature. Macbeth has full knowledge of right and wrong; he knows that he has committed a very great crime by murdering Duncan. Shakespeare shows us how Macbeth becomes hardened to his crimes, and yet how he suffers from fears which he has created himself.

On the last level, the play has great power as a work of poetry and imagination. The language is rich in sound and meaning, full of pictures, and immensely varied. Take this episode, for example. When Macbeth comes from the murder of Duncan, his hands are covered in the king's blood; he looks at them, and feels that all the waters in the ocean cannot wash away the blood, but that

this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red. (2, 2, 61-3)

The word 'multitudinous' gives a sense of vastness, and 'incarnadine' (meaning 'redden') is another impressive word; its length and sound give strength to the meaning. The two words are more Latin than English, and were very new to the English language; Shakespeare was one of the first writers to use them. They are followed by the simplest, most direct words. Imagine a film camera. First the camera shows you a picture of endless waters, stretching as far as the eye can see: then a sudden close-up picture, perhaps a small pool of green water that turns red with blood as we look at it. Such skill in the use of language is unique.

Although I have distinguished four levels on which the play *Macbeth* can work, I do not want to give the impression that these levels can in fact be separated from each other. The entertainment, the moral teaching, the psychology, and the poetry are often all contained in the same speech—even, sometimes, in the same line. *Macbeth* demands an alert reader.

No summary can do justice to the play. At best, a commentary such as this can be no more than a map. It can show the roads, and even point out the important places; but it is no substitute for reading the play.

Leading characters in the play

- Duncan** The king of Scotland, murdered by Macbeth. Duncan is a true and gracious king, who represents the Elizabethan concept that the king was appointed by God, and is therefore almost divine.
- Malcolm** Duncan's elder son. Early in the play Malcolm is named as the next king of Scotland. After Duncan's murder Malcolm, with his brother Donalbain, escapes from Scotland. He takes refuge in England, at the court of Edward the Confessor, until he is able to lead an army against Macbeth. At the end of the play he is crowned king of Scotland.
- Macbeth** A mighty and ambitious warrior, one of the leaders of Duncan's army. He hears a prophecy that he will be king one day. This makes him more ambitious and leads him to murder Duncan. He is elected king of Scotland, but he becomes a cruel and unjust ruler. He is always conscious of guilt, and never knows a moment's peace after he has killed Duncan. At the end of the play he is killed by Macduff. (See also p. xix.)
- Lady Macbeth** She is even more ambitious than her husband, and has no regard for morality. She urges Macbeth to kill Duncan, and refuses to understand his doubts and hesitations. Husband and wife are at first affectionate, hiding nothing from each other; gradually this relationship is destroyed. Lady Macbeth becomes obsessed with the murder of Duncan, suffers from nightmares, and finally kills herself.
- Banquo** He and Macbeth are the leaders of Duncan's army, but he is not so conspicuously valiant as Macbeth. It is prophesied that his children will be kings, but although he hopes that this prophecy will come true, he takes no action. He is killed by murderers working for Macbeth, but his son, Fleance, escapes.
- Macduff** A Scottish thane (nobleman), who comes to prominence after the murder of Duncan. Macbeth is particularly afraid of him, and orders murderers to kill Lady Macduff and her children. Macduff

persuades Malcolm to lead an army against Macbeth, and it is he who kills Macbeth.

Ross Although Ross has a large part in the play, he does not really have a 'character'. He brings messages, describes events, warns of dangers to come, and comments on the progress of the play.

Macbeth: The play

Act I

- Scene 1 A very short scene opens the play. It is long enough to awaken curiosity, but not to satisfy it. We have come in at the *end* of the witches' meeting, just as they are arranging their next appointment before their 'familiar spirits'—devils in animal shapes—call them away into the 'fog and filthy air'. The mood of the play is set here, although the action does not start until the next scene. Here we
- Scene 2 learn about the tough battle, about the rebels who seem to have all the luck, and about two brave men, Macbeth and Banquo, who win the victory for Scotland. Duncan rewards Macbeth for his courage by giving him the title 'thane of Cawdor'; but we ought to remember that the title first belonged to one who was 'a most disloyal traitor'.
- Scene 3 The witches' malice and magic are shown, as they await Macbeth on the lonely moor (a wasteland area). They have power over the winds, and can make life miserable for such men as the captain of the ship, 'The Tiger'. Their dance, when they hear Macbeth's drum, is made up of steps in groups of three—the magical number. Macbeth and Banquo, however, are ordinary human beings, tired after the day's fighting and grumbling about the weather. Banquo is almost amused by the witches; he cannot bring himself to think of them as women because 'your beards forbid me to interpret/That you are so'. Macbeth is stunned to silence by their prophecies, but Banquo questions them calmly.

The audience can judge the witches better than Macbeth can; *we* know, from the previous scene, that his courage, and not the witches' magic, has won him the title 'thane of Cawdor'; and we are not surprised, as he is, when Ross calls him by this title. While Ross, Angus, and Banquo speak together (perhaps at the back of the stage), Macbeth speaks his own thoughts aloud in a soliloquy—a speech not intended by the speaker to be overheard. They are frightening thoughts: they frighten Macbeth as well as us, for

murder is in his mind. He tries to reject this first impulse, declaring that he will leave everything to chance:

If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me
Without my stir.

Scene 4 When Duncan hears of the death of the treacherous thane of Cawdor, he utters a very meaningful remark:

There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.

We have not seen the traitor, so we do not know how appropriate these words are for *him*; but we have seen his successor, and Macbeth is certainly a gentleman on whom Duncan is building 'An absolute trust'. Duncan's comment could also be applied to other persons and happenings in this play, where things are not what they seem to be, where 'Fair is foul and foul is fair'.

Duncan now makes a very important announcement:

We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland.

In the time of Duncan the crown of Scotland was not passed automatically from father to son. Instead, the king could name his successor, as Duncan does here, and grant him the title 'Prince of Cumberland'. If the king were to die without naming an heir, or if the heir was not acceptable, the Scottish nobles could elect a new king. We hear that Macbeth is thus elected in *Act 2, Scene 4*. Duncan's choice comes as a great shock to Macbeth, for he recognizes it as an obstacle standing between him and the crown. At the end of the scene he admits to possessing 'black and deep desires', but he is afraid to speak these openly, even to himself.

Scene 5 We already know the contents of Macbeth's letter to his wife; but the letter is important because it shows us something of the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: he has no secrets from her, and she is his 'dearest partner of greatness'. Lady Macbeth understands her husband well. She knows that he has great ambitions, but she also knows that he is honourable, and that this sense of honour will not allow him to 'catch the nearest way'. She knows that she will have to urge her husband on to become

king, and she calls for evil spirits to help her. She will give up all the gentle, tender qualities of a woman, so that she can become a sexless, pitiless fiend. She takes full control over the situation, and Macbeth seems glad to let her have the responsibility.

Scene 7 Alone after dinner, Macbeth has the opportunity to think about the murder of his king, perhaps for the first time. At first murder had been only a dream, 'but fantastical' (1, 3, 139), but now it is a real moral problem. He knows that the crime must be punished; divine justice in a 'life to come' does not worry him so much as judgement in this earthly life. Then he considers the duties he owes to Duncan—the duties of a kinsman, of a subject to his king, and of a host to his guest. Finally he thinks of the character of Duncan, a king of almost divine excellence.

Macbeth has a vision of the heavenly powers, horrified by this murder; he sees Pity, personified as a 'naked new-born babe' which is nevertheless 'Striding the blast', while 'heaven's cherubin' are mounted on the winds. The speech builds to a mighty climax—then suddenly the power is lost, when Macbeth turns to his own wretched motive for committing such a crime. He can find nothing except 'Vaulting ambition', and even now he realizes that too high a leap ('vault') can only lead to a fall.

His mind is made up, and he tells his wife 'We will proceed no further in this business'. He is not prepared for her rage and abuse. She calls him a coward, insults his virility, and declares that she would have murdered her child while it was feeding at her breast, rather than break such a promise as Macbeth has done. Defeated by his wife's scorn, and persuaded by her encouragement, Macbeth agrees to murder his king.

Act 2

Scene 1 The witches have disturbed Banquo, as well as Macbeth. As he crosses the courtyard of Macbeth's castle he hears a noise, and calls for his sword: this suggests tension, for he should not need a sword in a friend's home. Macbeth also shows signs of stress, for he speaks few words in his replies to Banquo; and when he is alone, the strain shows very clearly. He is living in a nightmare, but although he is at first alarmed by the dagger that his imagination creates, he seems

later to *enjoy* the horror of the moment. The last lines of the scene could even show a grim humour:

the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven, or to hell.

Scene 2 Lady Macbeth is as tense as her husband, and she has been drinking to give herself courage. Her speech is jerky, for she reacts to every sound, and when her husband comes from the king's room, his hands red with Duncan's blood, she greets him with relief and pride: 'My husband'. He has now proved himself, in her eyes, to be a man. Macbeth slowly awakens from the nightmare he has been living in and realizes what a terrible crime he has committed. He speaks of the real sounds he has heard, and then of the voice that cried

'Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep'

This ban will be carried out: never again will Macbeth, or his wife, have any rest, and from time to time throughout the play they will comment on their weariness and lack of refreshing sleep.

For the present, however, Lady Macbeth again takes charge of the situation. Early in this scene she revealed some natural, womanly feelings when she confessed that she could not murder Duncan herself because he 'resembled / My father as he slept'. But now she speaks a line which shows, terrifyingly, how little she thinks of the guilt that she shares with her husband:

A little water clears us of this deed.

Scene 3 The mood of the play suddenly changes. The audience has been as tense as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the last scene, and we need to relax a little now. The Porter, woken from a drunken sleep, gives us something to laugh at. His jokes are not so funny today as they were in 1606, when his chatter about the 'equivocator' might have reminded the audience of the recent and notorious trial of a priest who could 'swear in both the scales against either scale'; but the wise observations on drink and lechery are still amusing.

Macduff and Lennox come almost from another world; or perhaps the Porter is more accurate than he thinks when he pretends to be porter at the gate of hell. The tension mounts again as we wait for the murder to be discovered.

Lennox's description of the 'unruly' night would have been full of significance to the Elizabethans. They firmly believed that any disorder in human affairs was reflected by disorder in the world of nature. Macbeth is cautious, but we cannot miss the understatement of his reply to Lennox: 'twas a rough night'.

The moment we have been waiting for arrives. Macduff's words emphasize the fact that this is more than an ordinary murder:

Confusion now has made his masterpiece!
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed temple.

The scene is chaotic: alarm-bells ring, and characters appear from all sides of the stage. Macduff is almost hysterical; the king's sons are afraid; Macbeth impulsively kills Duncan's servants—and by doing so arouses Macduff's suspicion. The speech in which Macbeth attempts to justify himself may perhaps convince the other thanes; but we know how false it is, and the elaborate images (for example, 'His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood') stress this falsehood. Lady Macbeth knows the truth too, for she faints (or pretends to faint) and some attention is drawn away from her husband.

Scene 4

The short scene between Ross and the Old Man serves three purposes. At first it continues the comparison begun in Lennox's lines in Scene 3 between the human world and the natural world, mentioning strange events and stressing that they are

unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done.

The second function of the scene appears when Macduff enters to bring more news: it indicates the passing of time. Thirdly, it brings Macduff into greater prominence, because it allows the actor playing the part of Macduff to reveal, by the tone of his voice, that Macduff continues to be suspicious of Macbeth, and that he does not himself believe the answers he gives to Ross's questions.