Criticism On Macbeth.

Examination Sophomore year.

Of the numerous poets that have existed in the world, Shakespeare is the most general. By this I mean that the characters found in his plays are and have been, existing, by every idea and dime of the civilized world. And so deeply and clearly did the poet read human nature, that we may find many of his characters in every nation and tongue. Some of the students of human nature have, indeed, reached for our into the common mass of mind, and brought in a few of the numerous characters who are always to be found. But Shakespeare seems to have gathered the whole world in one mighty speech and placed it before us for every one's individual use; for in him we find the prattling child as well as the wisest philosophers; the toiler as well as the brave; the peasant as the king; and the virtuous as well as the villains. To obtain something of an idea of the magnificence in which this poet's great mind was enabled to accomplish comprehend the soul of those about him, we may consider him as raised above the common level and from his experience viewing the characters of those below him. It may not be impossible for someone to behold what he says, but no one can ever see more, since within the range of this poet's eye all men seem to have appeared.
Thus we behold Shakespeare in his true position as regards his fellow men.

Since order and arrangement are the primary requirements in the great mind, our poet has consequently grouped upon into various classes. This done, he then has arranged them in proper places for the common inspection of all. But how the question arises, how he was able to do justice to these classes? He has simply made a Comprehensive Dictionary of Human Nature. In other words, he has given us a sort of Mythology. And as Jupiter, Minerva, Apollo, and the Muse, were personifications of Supreem Power, Wisdom, Music, and Poetry, so each of Shakespeare's marked characters is but a representation of a class of men similar to itself. Hence we may justly name his works either "A Dictionary of Mythology," or "The Exponent of Human Nature" or "The Mirror of All Mankind."

Our theme leads up to the contemplation of the characters in the play of Macbeth. We now would naturally look first to the peculiarities of the personages here represented, and then see how, upon the stages of history and see whose image we have here.

But time will permit us to give only a passing glance at the characters in the play. In the person of Macbeth, we have a character not infrequently met in history and whose general disposition will apply to many: During early life a soldier, wholly his skill and
bravery brings himself into the notice of the king. He is promoted, and continues to acquire, day by day, until he is second only to his majesty. But becoming first by an unnatural ambition, he is led to conspire the horrid assassination of his best earthly friend, to whom he owes all that he has ever had, all that he now possesses, and all that he may reasonably expect to obtain. But alas! for depraved nature, he is urged on by the Devil, now in woman form, and finally commits his first cruel murder; from which, however, he does not escape without many a sting of a troublesome conscience. At length, upon the throne, he must remove every obstacle to the quiet possession of his prize. A Banquo, his equal in arms, being naturally present, presents himself as one who, without just reclaim, equal honors. He is accordingly soon dispatched. Then follow a long train of evil forebodings, reverse of conscience, and everything which tends to render the guilty man wretched still more wretched.

Our first impression of Macbeth's character is his fear. He is spoken of as a brave warrior, fearless in the fight. And hence, since a majority of the great men of the past have been soldiers, we expect, when we hear of their daring, to find in them men of true nobleness of character. Hence in the case of Macbeth our
sympathies are so strongly enlisted for
him that when at length we learn that his
was but little more than brute courage, our
past regard cannot be privately forgotten.
On the ghost of Banquo which appears
to Macbeth we have another proof, among the
many, which shows how wonderfully well
was Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature.
Some critics consider the poet unwise in
for founding his play upon the predictions of
the Weird Sisters. But when we consider the
superstitiousness of the people at the poet's day,
we find no cause for censure. But whatever
we might think in relation to the witches, we are
far from criticizing the introduction of the
ghost. Indeed, I consider it as one of the finest
or rather the most natural, creative, charactery
of the play. There is every reason to believe that
ghosts of Banquo are not confined to the
age of Shakespeare, but that as often as there has
been Macbeth, just so often have there been Ban-
quo's and Banquo's ghosts.

The mind of man is a wonderful mechanism.
Our world has not yet existed long enough to un-
veil its many mysteries. But because we cannot
measure the distances between the fixed stars, is no
reason why we may not between the planets of our
own solar system. By the case before we were
at liberty to behold the main agents which
gotled upon Macbeth's mind and set the effects pro-
duced by those agents upon his actions and unde
being. By way of illustration, it may be well to cite a few examples showing forth in some degree the remarkable power which the mind has over our senses and prevails over our whole being. We have only to think in our minds that some one of our senses takes cognizance of a certain sound, smell, or what ever it may be, to have that sensation actually produced. We all know how comical it is for us, when waiting for some far-off uncle's footsteps to be exceedingly disposed that we heard the one approaching, when upon observation no one had been at the door. Many instances could be brought to show the deft influence of the mind over the body but I must not dilate. A man was fainting amid all the agonies of hydrophobia, occasioned by the bite of a suspected mad dog. At length, it was ascertained that the dog was not, and never had been, mad, when which the animal was shown to the insane person, causing his immediate recovery. The other incidents occurred at Paris, and as taken from Medical Works, is reliable. In the last early part of this century the physicians of Paris petitioned the government to permit them to experiment upon one of the prisoners who had been condemned to death. The request was granted. Their victim was first tightly bound and his arm laid bare, having been securely bound and other arrangements...
grade, he was informed that it had been determined that he should be bled to death instead of being executed, as was customary, and that it would require but half an hour's flow of blood for death to ensue. The announcement was received very calmly by the prisoner, who had been expecting this blow on that day. His arm was then suddenly cut by the lancet, but not so as to draw blood, and for the same instant a stream of water, blood warm, was poured upon the wound. The stream was not allowed to vary either in quantity or rapidity. After the pretended bleeding had been going on for five minutes, the prisoner was told that there were but twenty-five minutes left for him to live and that every drop his countenance has assumed a somewhat paler hue. At intervals of five minutes each, he is to continually informed as to the amount of time left, increasing pale of his countenance, the strength of his pulse, and the amount of blood discharged up to the present moment. The victim occasionally speaks of his treatment and growing weakness, visibly believing in the truth of the affair and feeling what he says. Recently, where almost should half the time has expired, the prisoner's countenance is actually changing to a deathly hue, a circumstance about which the physicians are not, of course, slow to enlighten him. He cannot accede this change to fright, for the prisoner at first talked particularly as everyone so near death
could be expected to; and it is not till he has become too faint to speak that he ceases from occasional conversation. At last when only five minutes are left for the poor man, his pulse, which has been growing feeble and feeble, has now, almost entirely ceased to beat, and the color of his countenance has become that of a deathly hue. And now the physician, with his eye on his watch, and finger on the sinking man’s pulse, slowly counts out the feeble remaining minutes, and with each as they pass, the pulse grows fainter and fainter, and is scarcely perceptible, even to the physician’s touch, until at length, as the last moment comes, the heart of the dying man ceases for ever to beat. Thus this man died without injury or fright. If these three persons, in the possession of their right minds, should have such an influence over their right minds, and even the very existence of life, my marvel is then, when we behold the apparition of a murdered man appear before the eyes of one whose mind is driven about by constant fears and is continually dreading by a coincidence that will never cease. His knockings.

He will now briefly consider the character of Banquo. By nature he was much similar to Macbeth. Both were high
in rank—next to the king. Both seem equally ambitious. Banquo might well have uttered with Macbeth, the words:

"A man's fortune wishes to gnaw me, why should men make me so, without my will?"

That Banquo was unsatisfied with human nature is evident from his great confidence in the faithfulness of others. Had he been provided he would have known better than to have remained under Macbeth's dominion, since he must have been aware that his claims to the throne were nearly as glibly as valid as those presented by Macbeth. It is not until had experience teaches the good and unsuspecting man, that he believes that all men are not faithful. This lesson came too late for Banquo.

It is always the deceiver who is first to suspect the treachery of others. Hence when Macbeth goes on the throne by foul means, he fears being deposed in a similar manner. The great difference between these two men was owing to external agencies. Had there been a Lady Banquo of a nature similar to Lady Macbeth, we should have had in Banquo another Macbeth. But two Macbeths cannot exist in one kingdom, hence in the wisdom of the poet of Shakespeare's heaviest conceptions—Lady Macbeth.
occasion. Some have pictured her as a fiend, incarnate; others, indulging an almost annihilable. She and her husband seemed admirably suited to the instruments of evil spirits! for whatever propensity for evil, lacking, that she had, and whatever opportunities failed her to those he possessed. He was too disposed to meditate; she had no trouble from that quarter and was ever ready to break up his meditations and to urge him on in their deeds of darkness. He had to set guard upon trouble within, she knew that without. In this last difference lay the cause of the greater difference in the end of their lives. Woman, though inferior, in glory be, may in intellects be so much superior to him in moral qualities that if these be destroyed, she has lost her all, and is soon abandoned into a friend. While man, if robbed of his most noble qualities, has yet a few remaining redeeming traits which strongly enlist our sympathies.

To judge of the frequency of the characters asbuilt to Lady Macbeth that have existed in the world, would be a difficult task, for history has not except in few instances, drawn aside the curtain and allowed us to view castles halls and see there the real conductors of human
affairs. But we may be sure of one thing: that as often as we have seen a Macbeth, it is attributed to remorse of conscience. We are duly bound to respect that. It is so often that we have seen a Lady Macbeth. By the German critics, Solmsel, the inscrutability of Lady Macbeth is attributed to remorse of conscience. We are duly bound to respect the opinion of so great a writer, yet after careful consideration of the matter, I could find no reason for attributing such unfortunate circumstances in her life to such a cause. Indeed, it seems quite evident that the poet intended to represent her to us as just the reach of the Monitor. Whether there was the effect of holding the mind constantly upon one and contentious habit was that her husband would, in some manner or other, betray their deeds of wickedness. This was her all-absorbing theme from which her mind never was released. She talked about it by day and dreamed by night. I found the very first she feared, this "milk of human kindness," and this was enough to give sufficient food for her anxious meditations. She had not yet seen no real cause for fearing her husband's power to keep their secret but when by his unnatural manner he broke
up the social gathering, she has now positive
evidence of his frailty of mind in granting
against the deal. Reasoning sustaining
and now let us listen to what she says
and mark whether or no it is he conceives
that troubles her: "Out, damned spot,
and I say! One, two; why is time to
do it—Hell is murky, fle, my lord, fle,
a soldier and afraid? What need we
fear who knows it, when none can call
our power to account?" She goes back,
in thought, to the time just before the
murder of Duncan, where she had good
reason to be troubled in respect to Mac-
beth's fears. Now listen again: "No
more is that, my lord, no, I speak other;
you can all this by starting." Still
admonishing him, I to be slain. Now
she seems to think the murder just
accomplished, and in anxiety about
Macbeth, his bearer says: "Wash your
hands, put on your knight's gown; look
not so pale, I tell you yet again, Ban-
quos buried, she exclaims, come out of
his grave." Thus we see it very evident
that Lady Macbeth's insanity was giving
principally to abatement of thought upon
are subject. In other words, she became a
I have thus given a very vague description of the principal characters that appear in Macbeth. This play, like Hamlet, is marked by a great degree of variety. The transitions of the scenes from the wild, dismal castle, wherein we saw that strange compound, to the castle with all its cheery splendor, is quite refreshing, especially to one of nervous temperament; not to mention after that fearful night in which good Duncan fell, unavenged. — The plays, Macbeth and The Merchant of Venice, are superior to Othello and Hamlet on the nice distinction of character, and superiority in the arrangement and combination of their plot. In Othello and especially in Hamlet we are disappointed at the unhappy termination of the plays. In the former we learned that such a noble soul as that the Moor should have fallen beneath the deceitfulness of Iago; in the latter we are at lost to find a suitable cause for the introduction of the ghost of Hamlet's father, consequent upon which cause the death of Hamlet himself. Of course, the opposition was avenged, but at what a sacrifice! He that was supposed to obtain his satisfaction loses his life in taking it. On the other hand, in The Merchant of Venice we rejoice, having cattle or no sympathy for Shylock, to see his property confiscated.
In Macbeth ye may regard to behold pow'rs once noble become so debased, still we cannot refrain from excitation when we see the tyrant, brought low.

Jas. Readway,
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Also read (or part) as chapel essay.