Macbeth and the Seeds of Time

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> Then gin I think on that which Nature said,
> Of that same time when no more change shall be,
> But steadfast rest of all things, firmly stayed
> Upon the pillars of eternity,
> That is contrair to Mutability.
> For all that moveth doth in change delight;
> But thenceforth all shall rest eternally
> With him that is the God of Sabaoth hight.
> O that great Sabaoth God, grand me that Sabbath's sight.
>   (Spenser, The Mutability Cantos, *viii*, 2)

In the last scene of *Macbeth*, Macduff enters the stage holding the severed head of the tyrant, hails the rightful king and says, "Behold, where stands / Th' usurper's cursed head: the time is free" (V.ix.20–21).[1] Macduff's lapidary words point out a correlation between time and the unlawfulness of Macbeth's past actions. The word *time* is reiterated thrice before the end of the play by Malcolm in a speech directed to restore universal order. During the unfolding of the story Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and Banquo use the word repeatedly and show a deep preoccupation with time and its effect.[2] The play seems to be dominated by an obsession with time, and as a critic has noted "characters rush about in frantic haste, the action strains forward, the present is only a stepping stone to the future."[3]

The idea of time occurs insistently in Renaissance art and literature, and understandably so. During the Middle Ages, man viewed his earthly pilgrimage as a preparatory stage for the more important journey of the spirit after death. For him time was no great enemy because death, the inseparable companion of time, was really the starting point for a new, infinitely superior type of life. The humanist movement and the Renaissance altered these values. Although the afterlife was still important, earth was where man could assert his power and realize his inherent potential. Man, however, was helpless against time, which seemed to strike in two ways. On a physical level, it reduced the flower of youth to the withered decrepitude of old age, while, at the same time, it condemned his achievements and his deeds to oblivion. To slow time's pace, to arrest it, to subdue it, became a frequent challenge even though the battle was almost always lost.

Shakespeare's concern with time is a keynote of his lyric poetry and drama. In the *Sonnets* he is haunted by the destructiveness of the god Kronos, who with his powerful jaws seems to gnaw at everything that is beautiful in the world of nature and man. Shakespeare explores the means by which time's greed can be overcome and, in line with the teachings of Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, he suggests two outlets from time's tyranny: one, accessible to all, to be achieved through marriage and reproduction; the other obtainable by the intellectually gifted through poetry and fame.

Time makes its appearance again in the comedies, but playing a different role. He is the winged god Aion who heals wounds, allows wrongs to be undone and truths to be discovered, and mends the past with his regenerative power.

In *Macbeth*, I think, time is under scrutiny in its tripartite sequence of past, present, and future, which finds its graphic representation in a frightful tricephalous monster revived from antiquity by Renaissance iconographers, and before them by Petrarch. In the description of Syphax's palace in the third book of Petrarch's *Africa* the emphasis falls on the idea of time. The vaulted hall is embellished by the zodiacal signs and by images of gods and heroes among whom old Saturn makes his appearance,

> Inde autem incessu gravior tristisque senecta,
> Velato capite et glauco distinctus amictu,
> Rastra manu falcemque gerens Saturnus agresti
> Rusticus aspectu natos pater ore vorabat,
> *(III, 143–46)*

closely followed by the emblematic dragon biting its own tail,

> Flammivomusque draco caude postrema recurve
> Ore tenens magnos sese torquebat in orbes.
> *(III, 147–48)*[1]

The sequence does not end here. Apollo, the sun god, is portrayed together with a strange monster:

> At iuxta monstrum ignotum immensumque trifauci
> Assidet ore sibi placidum blandumque tuenti.
> Dextra canem, sed leva lupum fert atra rapacem,

> Parte leo media est, simul hec serpente reflexo
> Iunguntur capita et fugientia tempora signant.
>
> *(III, 160–64)*

Panofsky draws attention to these hexameters and points out that Petrarch resurrected the three-headed monster after more than nine hundred years of oblivion.[5] Around the end of the fourth century A.D. the unusual animal, attribute of the Egyptian solar deity Serapis, had been allegorized by Macrobius as a symbol of time.[6] The only notable change in Petrarch is the substitution of the Roman sun god Apollo for Serapis. The Italian humanist does not specify what each individual head and the coiling reptile body mean, but indicates that collectively this creature represents fleeting time. It is possible, therefore, that he was aware of the interpretation given by Macrobius, who wrote that the heads of the wolf, the lion, and the dog represented respectively past, present, and future. The substitution of Apollo for Serapis shows Petrarch's awareness of the role played by the sun in the alternation of days, months, and years.

The obsession with time in the iconographical details of Syphax's palace is reflected in Petrarch's *Triumphs*, where time is defeated only by eternity.

The tricephalous hieroglyph of time charmed Renaissance scholars, possibly also because of its ancient Egyptian origins. Francesco Colonna used it in the *Hypnerotomachia Polyphili*, Valeriano mentioned it twice in the *Hieroglyphica*, under the headings *Sol* and *Prudentia*, and Vincenzo Cartari gave its detailed description and related interpretation in *Le Imagini . . . degli Dei degli Antichi*.

A more esoteric and sinister meaning, however, was illustrated by Titian in a late painting, *The Allegory of Prudence*, by juxtaposing tha ancient symbol with a second image rooted in Western art. Titian, as Panofsky explains at length, placed a human face over each of the three animal heads of the monster. The shaded profile of an old man on the left, just above the wolf's head, merges with the frontal features of a vigorous middle-aged man in the center, above the lion's head; the sequence ends with a second profile on the right-hand side, portraying a young man, below whom the head of a dog appears. The painting has the characteristics of an emblem, as can be seen from its inscription, "Ex Praeterito / Praesens Prudenter Agit / in Futurā Actionē Deturpet" ("From the [experience of the] past, the present acts prudently, lest it spoil future action"). The words *past*, *present*, and *future* are used as tags respectively for the old, the middle-aged, and the young man. The moral significance of the upper part of the painting is clear. Through the

memory of the past the prudent man learns to conduct himself in the present, and through foresight he plans for the future.[7] The animal trio used by Titian to complete the icon may seem to reinforce the idea of time. To Panofsky the two heterogeneous motifs appear to be saying the same thing.[8] This may be debatable. Cartari, following Macrobius' description and interpretation, writes,

> A canto à costui [Serapis] stava, come scrive Macrobio, una figura con tre capi, che si univano in un corpo solo, intorno al quale era avolto un serpente in modo che lo nascondeva tutto, e porgeva la testa sotto la sua destra mano, come che egli sia padrone di tutto il tempo mostrato per gli tre capi ch'io dissi. Delli quali l'uno quel di mezo, che era di Lione, significava il tempo presente, perche questo, posto fra il passato, e quello che ha da venire, è infatti, & ha forza maggiore che gli altri. L'altro dalla parte destra di piacevole cane mostrava, che il tempo à venire con nuove speranze ci lusinga sempre. Et il terzo dalla sinistra di Lupo rapace voleva dire, che il tempo passato rapisce tutte le cose, e se le divora in modo che di molte non lascia memoria alcuna.
>
> (p. 81)[9]

The fearsome monster seems to convey a meaning somewhat antithetical to that of the *motto* and of the three human heads. If the past erases memory, it cannot act as a guide for the present. The future, on the other hand, allures with mere hopes. The lower section of the painting is thus a modification, not a replica, of the upper one. Serapis' companion, in the context of Titian's work, suggests a threat against the prudent man's behavior and a warning against irrational conduct.[10]

The interrelation between the arts common in the Renaissance is likely to have carried the image from the realm of the visual to that of poetry and theater. At the beginning of *Macbeth* (I.ii), Shakespeare introduces the hero as the brave, valiant, worthy gentleman fighting for his king and country. We should expect him to behave in accordance with the virtue of prudence. Yet Macbeth yields to the sinister monster of iconographical tradition and encounters his own ruin.

Three-dimensional time finds its way into the play in an unobtrusive fashion in the short first scene of Act I. Three witches appear on stage. The temporal conjunction "when" is reiterated three times in the space of four lines. The number three is recurrent in the play. The witches use it in their

incantations (I.iii.35–36; IV.i.1–2) and in the triple repetition of words, in their triple hailing of Macbeth and Banquo, and in the number of apparitions they evoke in the cauldron scene.[11]

That the Weird Sisters may suggest time is transparent in Act I, scene iii. The present Macbeth with a temporal sequence of past, "Thane of Glamis," present, "Thane of Cawdor," and future, "that shalt be king" (I.iii.48–50). They are reminiscent of the Fates or Parcae of classical mythology.[12] Holinshed speculates on their origin, first likening them to "creatures of elder world," and later speaking of them as "the goddesses of destinie."[13] The woodcut which illustrates the earlier edition of Holinshed's *Chronicles* (London, 1577) exhibits these three women as old, middle-aged, and young.[14] Cartari gives many details about the Parcae that seem relevant to the play and support the identification of the Weird Sisters with the goddesses of destiny. The mythographer indicates their age difference:

> E per ciò finsero gli antichi, che fossero tre, e l'una havesse la cura del nascere, l'altra del vivere, la terza del morire. Onde è, che stando tutte insieme a filare le vite de i mortali, teneva una, la più giovane, la conocchia, e tirava il filo, l'altra di maggiore età l'avolgeva intorno al fuso, e la terza già vecchia lo tagliava.
>
> *(p. 299)*[15]

He relates them to fate,

> . . . alcuni hanno detto, che i Poeti intesero il medesimo [il Fato] sotto la fittione delle Parche, e che le fecero tre, perche ogni cosa comincia da un principio, e caminando pel suo appropriato mezo arriva al destinato fine,
>
> *(p. 301)*[16]

and to time, in its sequence of past, present, and future,

> Lachesi [canta] del passato, Cloto del presente & Atropo di quello, che ha da venire.
>
> *(p. 302)*[17]

The tripartite sequence of past, present, and future belongs to historical, objective time, a linear continuum in which events occur. It is the road on which man journeys and on which everything finds a patterned order sanc-

tioned by God's will. Macbeth's subjective experience of time dislocates this natural order. He coerces time in two ways. On the one hand, he accelerates it by hastening Duncan's death; on the other hand, he stops its natural unfolding by trying to prevent the succession of Banquo's progeny. Like the voracious wolf of Serapis' monster, he tries unsuccessfully to wipe out the memory of past murders. He is so blinded by the lure of a royal future that he cannot appreciate the dangers and the metaphysical convulsion involved in trying to "jump the life to come" (I.vii.7).

Macbeth's malady is not a mere obsession to live in or to conquer the future, as some critics have contended.[18] His sin is far more presumptuous. By interfering with past and future, Macbeth crystallizes the world around him in a continuous present, in fixed permanency. If the present, however, were to be a continuum, there would no longer be time, but only eternity. Only by following the past and becoming future does the present belong to time. Time and eternity are incompatible. St. Augustine discusses this nexus and allots time to the realm of created things and of man, eternity to God.[19] Man's short sight hinders his simultaneous perception of different events and compels him to experience the world around him as a sequence of past, present, and future. God's vision, on the other hand, is omniscient and unfolds in a perpetual present:

> But thou doest precede all tymes past, by the sublimity of thy ever present eternity: & thou overlookest al future tymes, because they are both future now, and when they shall have beene come, they will be past. But thou art still the same, and thy years wil not faile. Thy years, do neither goe, nor come; but ours do both goe, and come; that so at length, they may all become . . . Thy years are one day; and thy Day is not every Day; but this Day; because thy present day, doth neither take the place of yesterday, nor give the place unto, Tomorrow. Thy present Day is Eternity.[20]

Macbeth tries to live in an everlasting present and dresses himself in "borrow'd robes" (I.iii.108) "that cleave not to their mould" (I.iv.146); not those of the former Thane of Cawdor, but rather God's. His "vaulting ambition" places Macbeth in a *milieu* exclusive to God. Macbeth fails to understand the difference that runs between Providence and fate, between God's plan and its manifestation in time. Boethius in *De Consolatione Philosophiae* clearly defines this distinction:

> The creation of all thinges, & the disposing of mutable Natures, &
> what ever by any meane is mooved, getes the cause, order, & forme
> of Godes mynde, stabilitie. . . . For Providence is Godes pleasure,
> appoyntyd by him that all rulith & all disposith. But Desteny is the
> disposing of causes joynd to remooving causes, by which Providence
> knittith all thinges by her orders. For Providence includith all, whither
> they be divers or infinite, but Desteny devideth every thing according
> to her motion, distributing it to place, to forme, & time. . . .
>
> *(IV.vi)* [21]

Macbeth dismisses God's plan, which has to unfold in time, and by so doing,
deceives himself into thinking that he may partake in God's foreknowledge.
His act of killing both the past, in the person of Duncan, and the future, in
the person of Banquo, becomes a parody of God's creation. God created light,
Macbeth and Lady Macbeth destroy it. This results in chaos and in an un-
naturally prolonged night falling over the world. Rosse is astounded at this
strange phenomenon:

> by th'clock 'tis day,
> And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp.
> Is 't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
> That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
> When living light should kiss it?
>
> *(II.iv.6–10)*

The deadly power of the night undermines the life-giving energy of the sun.

Macrobius' tableau shows the three aspects of linear time in the form of
the three heads plus the coiled snake and Serapis. Serapis, or Apollo in later
iconographies, represents the sun which, with its revolution, dictates the
progression of time. The sun also brings about circular, regenerative time,
such as the succession of day and night and the alternating seasons, which
in turn affect the vital cycles of humans, animals, and plants. Circular time
may be suggested by the coiled snake, reminiscent of the image of the serpent
biting its own tail. [22] Besides impairing the movement of linear time, Macbeth's
killing of Banquo and unsuccessful attempt on Fleance also obstruct rege-
nerative time. The morality and spirituality of the individual characters in the
play could almost be measured by their respective attitude toward time. That
Banquo perceives time as growth is indicated several times. His questioning
of the Weird Sisters, for instance, is structured with images of growth:

> If you can look into the seeds of time
> And say which grain will grow, and which will not,
> Speak then to me, who neither beg, nor fear,
> Your favours nor your hate.
>
> (I.iii.58–61)

His time-growth perception is reinforced when he reassures Duncan, who holds a similar attitude, with the following words,

> There if I grow,
> The harvest is your own.
>
> (I.iv.31–32)

At the deceiving sight of Inverness castle, the idea of birth and growth surfaces again:

> This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
> By his lov'd mansionry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here: no jutty, frieze,
> Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
> Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle:
> Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd
> The air is delicate.
>
> (I.vi.3–10)

Banquo sees himself as "the root and father / Of many kings" (III.i.5–6). His lineage, which unfolds in front of Macbeth's eyes in the dumb show (IV.i), seems to "stretch out to th'crack of doom" (IV.i.117). The emphasis in this scene falls on the likeness of the eight successive kings to Banquo himself. The motif of resemblance between parents and children is recurrent in Shakespeare. In *The Winter's Tale* it is used in relation to the theme of the regeneration and spiritual rebirth of the old; in the *Sonnets* it is one way to attain immortality. The idea of circular time in *Macbeth* is embodied in Duncan, Malcolm, and, more specifically, Banquo, as the ancestor of King James. After the killing of Duncan and just before the murder of Banquo, Macbeth remarks that

> We have scorch'd the snake, not kill'd it:
> She'll close, and be herself.
>
> (III.ii.13–14)

The image of the snake occurs again after the murderers' report:

> Thanks for that.—
> There the grown serpent lies; the worm, that's fled,
> Hath nature that in time will venom breed,
> No teeth for th' present.
>
> *(III.iv.27–30)*

Henry N. Paul reckons that the language and imagery of Acts Three and Four were suggested to Shakespeare by a woodcut he found in *De Origine, Moribus, et Rebus Gestis Scotorum* by the historian John Leslie, published in Rome in 1578. The cut shows Banquo's line in the form of a family tree, which not only bears leaves and flowers, but also a trunk in the shape of a serpent. Paul comments, "Macbeth's thwarted ambition imagines the serpentine trunk of the tree as drawn in the cut to be a 'snake' he cannot kill . . . or a 'serpent.' "[23] I am more inclined, however, to relate the image of the serpent to Macrobius' iconography, with which Shakespeare could have been familiar through the writings of the mythographers. Macbeth's words suggest the circularity of the serpent's image, which cannot be discontinued because it is the image of immortality itself. In spite of the ominous and traditional association of trees with serpents in the context of the Fall, the image of the snake is used here *in bono*, as sign of circular, regenerative time.

The controlling power behind the witches' evil seems to rest with the goddess Hecate. She has been a favorite topic of discussion among critics, some of whom have questioned the authenticity of the Hecate scenes. The songs, which the Folio directs as sung by the goddess, also appear in Middleton's *The Witch*. For this reason some critics propose that Middleton may have introduced these songs and the lines immediately preceding them into the play. Nevertheless Shakespeare does allude to Hecate in Macbeth's soliloquy (II.i.51–52), which provides a strong suggestion that he could in fact be the originator of the idea of a personal intervention by the goddess in the action of the play. Some modern productions ignore Hecate's role altogether. This may well be arbitrary, because, in reality, there is not enough evidence for the spuriousness of the Hecate scenes. That these scenes appear in the first Folio of 1623 strongly supports them as an integral part of the original Shakespearean play.

In mythography, Hecate's domain extends to the world of the dead and to that of evil:

Ma altri hanno voluto, e forse meglio, che il dare à costei tre faccie

fosse fittione di Orfeo, volendo lui in questo modo mostrare gli variati aspetti, che di se ci fa vedere la Luna, e che la virtù sua ha forza non solamente in Cielo, ove la chiamano Luna, ma in terra anchora, ove la dicono Diana, e fina giù nello Inferno, ove Hecate la dimandano.

(p. 113)[24]

Hecate is the three-headed queen of darkness and, as Cartari also explains, the Moon is named as such when she is furthest away from the sun (pp. 113–14). One of her three heads is that of a dog, analogous to the three-headed infernal dog Cerberus, because the ancients thought that she was the goddess of Hades. In the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance three-faced monsters often represented the underworld, imaging an inversion of heavenly order and a parody of the Holy Trinity.[25] Satan is often depicted as three-faced, as, for instance, in Dante's *Inferno*:

> Oh quanto parve a me gran maraviglia
> quand'io vidi tre facce a la sua testa![26]

From Lucifer's mouths protrude three traitors, Brutus, Cassius, and Judas. In Dante's infernal world there are three furies and three rivers flow into the frozen lake of Cocytus.

In *Macbeth*, three-headed figures are associated with the respective ideas of time, darkness, the underworld, and magic, which seem to inform the basic issue underlying the play. Macbeth invokes Hecate before Duncan's murder. The regicide is a disruption of the divinely preordained hierarchy; Scotland, deprived of its king, is thrown into chaos and darkness. According to the medieval and Renaissance *scala naturae*, the king is on earth what the sun is in the sky, and the king's death is, therefore, the metaphoric cause for the disappearance of the "travelling lamp." In addition, Macbeth's sin is reminiscent of Satan's. The porter scene clearly suggests a correspondence between the castle at Inverness and Hell.[27] It seems appropriate that, in view of her links with darkness and the underworld, Hecate should be the deity that presides over the action of the play.

Although Hecate is first mentioned by Macbeth after the appearance of the hallucinatory, tempting dagger in Act II, she appears on stage only at the end of Act III and again at the beginning of Act IV. These two passages act as an introduction to Macbeth's confrontation with the iconic apparitions in the cauldron scene.

I am for th'air; this night I'll spend
Unto a dismal and a fatal end:
Great business must be wrought ere noon.
Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vap'rous drop profound
I'll catch it ere it come to ground:
And that, distill'd by magic sleights,
Shall raise such artificial sprites,
As, by the strength of their illusion,
Shall draw him on to his confusion,

says Hecate, displaying her evil power and witchcraft (III.v.20–29).

The three apparitions rising from the cauldron conform with the programmatic formula "fair is foul, and foul is fair" characteristic of the witches' behavior. Macbeth fails to understand the real significance of the random images with which he is presented: from the past, the bloody child, and from the future, the armed head and the crowned child. His spiritual blindness makes him interpret the prophecies literally and optimistically. In the witches' realm, however, fair is foul. Macbeth does not realize that in the unnatural, disorderly world which he himself has created the unnatural may indeed happen. As Cleanth Brooks puts it,

> pathetically and ironically for Macbeth, in returning to the Weird
> Sisters, he is really trying to impose rationality on what sets itself
> forth plainly as irrational: that is, Macbeth would force a rigid control
> on a future which, by definition—by the very fact that the Weird
> Sisters already know it—stands beyond his manipulation.[28]

Macbeth has tried to obliterate the past. Memories of his murders, nevertheless, keep coming back to him as sounds and visions. A voice crying "Sleep no more! / Macbeth does murther Sleep" (II.iii.34–35) haunts him after the murder of Duncan, and Banquo's ghost shakes his gory locks at him in the banquet scene (III.iv). Macbeth is also unsuccessful in stopping the future, which in Act IV comes to meet him in the form of three iconic images. The first, an armed head, gruesomely prefiguring his own, as displayed by Macduff at the end of the play, warns him against the power of the two images which are to follow. Brooks draws attention to the child symbolism which dominates the play, and he judges most fitting that the last of the prophecies in which Macbeth places his confidence should concern the child.[29] This ap-

parition is the symbol of the future that cannot be bridled and which seals
Macbeth's ruin. The future is not a meaningless sequence of tomorrows, as
Macbeth's misinterpretation seems to suggest (V.v.19–28), but is rather a time
for growth and restoration of order, as the crowned child with a tree in his
hand foretells. Even Macbeth's attempt to keep a foothold in the present fails.
Ironically, he is ultimately slain by Macduff, who, having been born by Cae-
sarean section, fulfils the prophecy that "none of woman born / Shall harm
Macbeth" (IV.i.80–81), allowing time to move forward again.

Only at the conclusion of the play is it possible to appreciate how the
iconographic motif of three-headed time is aesthetically and structurally cen-
tral to the play's theme.

The number three, besides its ordinal value, which informs repeated word-
patterns, reiteration of spells, and most of the witchcraft in the play, is used
by Shakespeare as a striking visual tool. By taking up various shapes and
forms in the *personae* of the Weird Sisters, of the goddess Hecate, and in the
apparitions, the number three haunts Macbeth throughout the parabolic jour-
ney of his damnation. It also provides a broad framework, a significant struc-
ture, within which the play unfolds. Ironically, Macbeth is lured into the role
of the overreacher by the triple hailing of the witches, and is doomed by the
triple apparition and its fulfillment. Both hailing and apparitions point to the
submerged yet central theme of the play, which, as I have suggested, is time
in its linear and cyclical manifestations.

Macbeth's attempt to undermine God's realization of Providence in history
is his capital sin. By interfering with past and future he fixes the world about
him in an unnatural, continuous present, a mockery of God's eternity. For
the duration of the tragedy Macbeth's vaulting ambition remains insensitive
to the warning that "fair is foul, and foul is fair" issued to him by three-
headed time itself in the *personae* of the Parcae.

In the Renaissance, myths, icons, and emblems were crucial parts of po-
etics and were often used to point a moral. Therefore, we lower our appre-
ciation of the complexity of Shakespeare's dramatic and poetic technique
when we ignore his indebtedness to iconographical and mythographical ma-
terial such as the tricephalous hieroglyph of time around which *Macbeth* is
shaped.

Notes:

1 All quotations from the play are taken from the New Arden edition, ed. Kenneth
   Muir (London: Methuen, 1951).
2 Shakespeare uses the word "time" forty-five times in the play. See Oxford Shake-

speare Concordances, *Macbeth*, ed. T. H. Howard-Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 219–20.

3 John B. Harcourt, "I Pray You, Remember the Porter," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 12 (1961), 393–402, p. 396.

4 Francesco Petrarca, *Africa*, ed. critica per cura di Nocola Festa (Florence: Sansoni, 1926).

5 Erwin Panofsky, "Titian's *Allegory of Prudence*: A Postscript," in *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 146–68.

6 The Italian mythographer Vincenzo Cartari also assigns the three-headed monster to the god Serapis. See V. Cartari, *Le Imagini . . . degli Dei* (Venice: Valgrifi, 1571), p. 81.

7 In Roman and Christian tradition memory, intelligence and foresight were thought to be at the base of the virtue called *prudentia*.

8 Panofsky, *Meaning*, p. 165.

9 "Next to him [Serapis], according to Macrobius, there was an image with three heads, conjoined in one body which was completely hidden by the coils of a snake. The head of the snake was just below Serapis' right hand, in order to show that he masters time, represented by the three heads of the monster. Of which the middle one was the head of a lion meaning the present, placed between the past and the future and more forceful than the others. The one on the right was the head of a pleasant dog, that is, the future which always allures us with new hopes. The third on the left was the head of a greedy wolf and it meant that the past takes away and devours everything so that it leaves no memory of many things" (my translation).

10 Panofsky draws attention to Giordano Bruno's *Gli Eroici Furori*, where the tricephalous symbol reappears. Bruno adopts a pessimistic interpretation which is voiced by the lover Maricondo. See Giordano Bruno, *Gli Eroici Furori* (Milan: Daelli, 1864), pp. 134–35.

11 Significantly, the number three is also associated with the triune goddess Hecate, whose patronage over the witches seems evident. Hecate is called *Triforme*, *Trigemina*, and *Trivia* by Cartari (p. 114–15), and is often represented iconographically with three faces.

12 John Doebler favors the idea of the Weird Sisters as Fates. He discusses their role in the light of many possibilities, not mutually exclusive, as proposed by various commentators. He then adds, "Shakespeare probably intended his witches to fulfill all of these dramatic possibilities at one point or another. Not only is Shakespeare characteristically writing by scenes, but in his Weird Sisters we also confront another Shakespearean union of contraries, the mode of thought so very popular in the Renaissance and so pervasive in Shakespeare. The witches are iconic stage images uniting the opposites of destiny and freely tempted evil." (John Doebler, *Shakespeare's Speaking Pictures: Studies in Iconic Imagery* [Albuquerque: Univ. of New Mexico Press, 1974], p. 120).

13 Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 7 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 494–95.

14 See Bullough, p. 494, and Doebler, Plate 24.

15 "Therefore the ancients imagined that they were three in number, and one took care of man's birth, the second of his life, the third of his death. For this reason, while they all together spun the lives of human beings, the youngest held the

distaff and pulled the thread, the middle-aged one wound it up around the spindle and the third, already an old woman, cut it" (my translation).

16 ". . . some said that Poets understood the Parcae as fate and they made them three in number, because everything has a beginning and, progressing through a middle stage, arrives at its destined end" (my translation).

17 "Lachesis [sings] of the past, Clotho of the present, and Atropos of that which is to come" (my translation).

18 See Frederick Turner, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 144; Cleanth Brooks, "The Naked Babe and the Cloak of Manliness," in *Macbeth: a Casebook,* ed. John Wain (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 193.

19 See Herman Hausheer, "St. Augustine's Conception of Time," in C. A. Patrides, ed., *Aspects of Time* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 30–37.

20 St. Augustine, *Confessions 1620* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1972), pp. 602–03.

21 Boethius, *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (1593) (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1899), pp. 91–92.

22 Panofsky, *Meaning,* p. 154.

23 Henry N. Paul, *The Royal Play of Macbeth* (New York: Macmillan, 1950), p. 176.

24 "But others maintained, maybe for better reasons, that it was Orpheus who gave her three faces, thus wanting to show the various aspects of the Moon and that her influence is not just powerful in the heavens, where they call her the Moon, but also on earth, where they call her Diana, and right down to Hades, where they call her Hecate" (my translation).

25 See Robert Hughes, *Heaven and Hell in Western Art* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 275.

26 Alighieri, *La Commedia,* ed. Petrocchi, II (Verona: Mondadori, 1966), *Inf.* XXXIV, 37–38.

27 Glynne Wickham, "Hell-Castle and its Door-Keeper," *Shakespeare Survey,* 19 (1966), 68–74.

28 Brooks, p. 197.

29 Brooks, p. 199.