MACBETH AND THE GHOSTS OF SOVEREIGNTY

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One of the most peculiar aspects of the banquet scene in *Macbeth* is that Macbeth is the only one, among those gathered, who sees Banquo's Ghost. He is at once distinguished and isolated by what he sees. What is the connection between Macbeth's isolation through what he alone sees, and the manifest purpose of the scene —namely, Macbeth's attempt to establish his position as sovereign through a public, theatrical display of hospitality? What does Macbeth's visual isolation say about the connection, so prevalent in the late sixteenth-century, between sovereignty, theatricality and spectatorship? I suggest that Macbeth's alienation from others in the banquet scene through what he alone sees announces not only the dissolution of Macbeth's sense of self and of his relation with those gathered but also a consequent failure of the theatrical model of sovereign presence which held sway in the Renaissance. I argue that indeed *Macbeth* presents us with a failure of the theatrical sovereign, a sovereign that is therefore incompatible with —and which puts into question— the dominant interpretation of theatrical sovereignty in Renaissance scholarship of the past 25 years. That is, I suggest that Macbeth's failure to share what he sees with those gathered, and his simultaneous failure to remain socially and visibly related with his subjects, marks the undoing of the conventional interpretation of sovereignty in the period —namely, a model through which the sovereign acquires his or her positions precisely through a manifestly theatrical, public display, like the banquet scene. In this way, Macbeth opens the way for the contractual model of sovereignty that the work of Thomas Hobbes will introduce a generation later.

One of the most peculiar aspects of the banquet scene in *Macbeth* is that Macbeth is the only one, among those gathered, who sees Banquo's Ghost (or says so aloud). He is at once distinguished and isolated by what he sees.

What makes this significant is not simply the implicit link here and elsewhere in the play between vision on the one hand, and isolation or solitude on the other. To be sure, there is age-old connection between vision and solitude; removal from others has often been presented as a fundamental condition for visual contemplation or speculation. Not by chance does the bond between contemplation and isolation find its most pervasive and powerful expression in the metaphysical, philosophical tradition inaugurated by Plato's

characterization of the philosopher's activity as at once solitary and visual (the word "idea," as is well known, derives from the verb *idein*, to see).[1]

This tradition finds a forceful renewal at the beginning of the seventeenth century in the work of René Descartes (1596-1650), whose isolation from others was in fact essential to his method of philosophical contemplation. Indeed, *Macbeth* has been regarded as something of a pre-cursor to Cartesian skepticism; and Macbeth himself has been interpreted as an introspective thinker whose "visions" reveal his fundamentally philosophical, and skeptical character.[2] Although this impulse to characterize Macbeth as "philosopher" or "skeptic" is certainly understandable, such interpretations overlook a crucial aspect of Macbeth's apprehension of Banquo's Ghost.

It is important to recall that, in the banquet scene, Macbeth is not alone. On the contrary, it is a manifestly *social* occasion, a gathering through which Macbeth is to present himself both as sovereign and as host *to others*: "Ourself will mingle with society. / And play the humble host" (3.4.3-4).[3] Whereas for philosophers, solitude is a *condition* for otherworldly speculation or contemplation, Macbeth's isolation is an *effect* of his vision. He is not alone in order to see; rather, he is isolated because of what he alone sees. Unlike the philosopher, Macbeth is surrounded by others that he himself invited, others who are there to see him. Indeed, it is the presence of these others which lends the banquet scene, and other sovereign displays of hospitality in *Macbeth*, their "theatrical" character. In short, given the sociality of the banquet scene, Macbeth can hardly be regarded as a philosopher; rather, the peculiarity of the scene requires us to account for *how* it is that he becomes isolated and distinguished from others through what he sees.

The scene is indeed peculiar. This is the only "Ghost" scene in Shakespeare which unfolds amidst a gathering of people, only *one* of whom sees the Ghost. We are thus dealing with the inverse of the opening of *Hamlet*, where the apparition of Old Hamlet's Ghost is shared by all those present. Likewise, the banquet scene is unlike *Julius Caesar* (1599), where Brutus is already alone when Caesar's Ghost appears; or the end of *Richard III* where the

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[1]Cf. Havelock (1963). For a good discussion of the relation between visuality and solitude in Greek philosophical thought, as well as of the anti-social nature of "thinking" more generally, see Arendt (1978: 75-78, 129-33).

[2]Stanley Cavell has offered perhaps the fullest account of the way in which Shakespeare's tragedies offer a kind of proto-skepticism. He writes, "My intuition is that the advent of skepticism as manifested in Descartes *Meditations* is already in full existence in Shakespeare from the time of the great tragedies..." (Cavell 1987: 3). See also his remarks in Cavell (1996). For another take on the relation between *Macbeth* and skepticism, see Gent (1983: 34).

[3]William Shakespeare, The Arden *Macbeth* (1994). All further references to *Macbeth* will be taken from this edition.

ghosts visit Richard in his sleep. Even the scene in Gertrude's chamber —
where Hamlet, but not his mother, sees the Ghost— does not have the explicitly
social nature of the banquet scene. In *Macbeth*, we are confronted with an
apparition which is not shared, *despite* the sociality of the gathering. It is
therefore Macbeth's isolation from, and distinction within, the plurality of the
gathering through what he alone sees which is decisive. Put another way,
Macbeth's isolation comes not from simply being alone (like Brutus or Richard
III) when Banquo's Ghost appears; but rather from being the only one, in the
presence of others, to see the apparition.

In this sense, Macbeth's apprehension of Banquo's Ghost in the banquet
scene is entirely *un*theatrical. For the theater is founded upon the temporal
sharing of a spectacle or vision by more than one person. If, as I argued
elsewhere, *Hamlet* inaugurates a theatrical community wherein sociality and
being-together are conditioned and shaped through the *event* of sharing a
spectacle, namely Old Hamlet's Ghost —then *Macbeth* represents something
like the inverse: the potential for isolation inherent in spectatorship.

I will argue furthermore that this isolation in *Macbeth* reflects the decline
of a certain model of sovereignty by which, up until the dawn of the
seventeenth-century, the sovereign acquired his or her position through
theatrical displays, social ceremonies and a dispersed visibility. In other words,
Shakespeare's *Macbeth* in fact presents the disappearance of a certain relation
between sovereignty and theatricality which Renaissance scholarship has
wanted to see in Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

In spite of the variety of works devoted to the connection between
"sovereignty" and "spectacle" in Early Modern England, it is nevertheless
possible to summarize the essential premise from which they all depart as
follows: *"theatricality" is a constitutive feature of sovereign authority*.
Different scholars have indeed shown us a number of diverse, specific ways in
which this formula proves true: from Stephen Orgel's interpretation of "court
masques," to Stephen Greenblatt's analysis of Elizabethan pageantry, to
Christopher Pye's work on Hobbes' *Leviathan* (Orgel 1975:1-17; Greenblatt,
1988; Pye 1990: 43-82). Nevertheless, the centrality of the perceived connection
between sovereignty and theatricality remains essentially unchallenged, and in
fact functions more generally as a figure for the intersection of a number of
other domains: the aesthetic and the political, the literary and the social. Indeed,
a correlative formula has often been added —namely, that theatricality crosses
the "boundary" between "aesthetic matters" and "political matters" (Pye 1990:
2). In other words, the inter-relation between theatricality and sovereignty has
been regarded as part of a more pervasive blurring of the boundaries between
aesthetics and politics. Consequently, there has emerged in recent years a

methodology which understands the political as irrevocably bound up with the aesthetic, the artistic as inextricably linked to the social, such that the one comes to be understood through the other.[4] However, the relation between theatricality and sovereignty is a unique one; in order to understand how it is that sovereignty is constituted "theatrically" it will be necessary to avoid slipping into broad, correlative arguments about aesthetics and politics. Indeed, it is not entirely clear that the relation between theatricality and sovereignty is reducible to either the aesthetic or the political, or their perceived inter-relation.

The most common synonym for "theatricality" in recent Renaissance scholarship has been "visibility." Indeed, one of the most consistent features of Renaissance scholarship over the past twenty years or so has been to understand the relation between theatricality and sovereignty as a situation in which the visible display of the sovereign figure is constitutive of that sovereign's power or authority. Pye summarizes this tendency when he writes that "recent assessments of Renaissance political force suggest an intimate connection between theater and powers of visibility" (Pye 1990: 43).

Now, "an intimate connection" between the theater and visibility is, of course, suggested by the etymology of the word "theatre" itself which derives from the Greek term *theatron*, "place for viewing," a term which in turn derives from the verb *theasthai* meaning "to behold," or from *thea* meaning "sight, or view."[5] However, what is peculiar about recent scholarly assessments of Elizabethan and Jacobean statecraft is the way in which "visibility" is not simply a feature of theatricality, but rather seems almost synonymous with theatrical experience as such, at least as far as the problem of sovereignty is concerned.[6] In perhaps the most influential of such accounts, Stephen Greenblatt emphasized that Elizabeth's position as sovereign was dependent

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[4]Or, as Leonard Tennenhouse puts it, we return to an historical moment in which the distinction between the "aesthetic" and the "political" has not been fully formulated —"we find it necessary to imagine a situation in where literature and political discourse has not yet been differentiated in the manner of modern critical discourse" (Tennenhouse 1986:2).

[5]See the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The word "theatre" has, interestingly, the same roots as the word "theory." It has been surmised, moreover, that both *theorein* and *theatron* derive, according to an ancient etymology, from the word *theos*, meaning "god" or "deity." For more on this etymology see, Levin (1988: 99f) and, Nicholas Lobkowicz (1967: 7n).

[6]Stephen Orgel, in a exception to this, points out that the "visibility" of the monarch contrasts markedly with the notion of the theater as a primarily *auditory* experience. "Theater in 1605," he writes, "was assumed to be a verbal medium." Orgel then argues that the theater later "became a visual medium" thanks to its court setting, and "destroyed the golden age of Shakespeare." Thus, for Orgel, the emergent bond between the theater and the court privileged visuality over verbality (Orgel 1975: 16-17).

"upon [her] privileged visibility."[7] Taking note of the manifestly theatrical structure of Elizabeth's visibility, he writes:

> As in a theater, the audience must be powerfully engaged by this visible presence and at the same time held at a respectful distance from it. (Greenblatt 1988: 64)

There are a couple of fundamental assumptions being made here about the theater, about visibility, and about the relation between theatrical spectacle and sovereignty which we must now unpack, since these assumptions have continued to inform subsequent studies dealing with "sovereignty" and theatrical "display."[8]

First, Greenblatt is suggesting that the structure of the spectacle puts "some distance" between the spectators and the spectacle, between subject and sovereign (Greenblatt 1991: 278). In other words, the "theatre" here becomes a figure for the fact that the spectacle is at some remove from the spectators; and it is this "respectful distance" which accounts for the power with which the scene invests the sovereign. Second, Greenblatt is suggesting that the "visible" presence of the sovereign itself exerts some "power" over the spectator. That is, the spectator is "powerfully engaged" by what s/he sees, and comes under the "spell," so to speak, of the vision itself.

Of course, some sights grab and hold our attention more than others; and the sight of Queen Elizabeth was no doubt quite compelling. But then again, I can be powerfully engaged by my own image in the mirror, gazing upon myself narcissistically "at a respectful distance." Indeed, the Narcissus myth has all the features of "visibility" ("distance," "powerful engagement") which Greenblatt describes, and yet it is not theatrical.[9]

In short, while it is true that theatrical visibility implies some distance between spectator and spectacle, and that all visibility means that the viewer falls under the spell (however brief or inconsequential) of what s/he sees, not all visibility is therefore "theatrical." Again, we have yet to understand what is

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[7]Pye cites this passage from Greenblatt on the same page to which I referred a moment ago. Cf. Pye (1990: 178).

[8]Greenblatt was not the first to emphasize "visibility" in this way —Orgel had done so some years before. But Greenblatt's essay is regularly cited in this regard. In addition to Pye, who cites Greenblatt's essay (Pye 1990: 43), see also Tennenhouse's (1986: 1-8, 187-88), Montrose (1996: 53-70). Other recent historical studies which deal with the "visibility" of the monarch are: McCoy (1990: 217-27), Frye (1993: 22-55).

[9]Ovid writes: "...as he drank, Narcissus was enchanted by the beautiful reflection that he saw... Spellbound by his own self, he remained there motionless, with fixed gaze, like a statue carved from Parian marble" (Ovid 1955: 85). Ovid's rendering powerfully makes Narcissus into both "subject" and "object" of his own intent gaze, while showing that the "distance" between Narcissus-the-desirer and Narcissus-the-desiring is as incommensurable as it is illusory.

precisely *theatrical* about Elizabethan sovereignty. In order to understand the importance of "theatricality" for sovereignty — and, indeed, in order to more carefully define the term itself— we need to take into account two other important features of theatrical experience to which I alluded in another work.

First, theatrical experience is fundamentally temporal. While it is true that the "theatre" is often figured in spatial terms —as an enclosure— it will be more important for our discussion here to recognize that theatricality is constitutively temporal. A theatrical space (whether a public playhouse, or royal court) is opened, and acquires its form and boundaries, only *while* the spectacle is unfolding. That is to say, the temporality of *being there* is what gives the space or enclosure its theatrical character. Whereas one can gaze at a marble sculpture, or at one's own reflection in a pond, without any inherent temporal constraint, a theatrical spectacle can only be seen while it is taking place. The force of what we call "theatricality" is thus inseparable from the time of the performance. Theatricality, therefore, is not so much a "concept" or "essence," but is rather *an event*.

Second, the theater is a communal event; unlike poetry, music or painting a theatrical work cannot take place in solitude. A plurality or gathering of persons is a necessity for "theatricality." In other words, to designate an occurrence as "theatrical" implies that it takes place in the presence of more than one person. Elizabethan statecraft obviously did not consist of Elizabeth standing alone, in front of a mirror, entranced by her own beauty, displaying herself to herself at "a respectful distance." Rather her visibility can be called "theatrical," and gave her power, because she appeared *before others*, her subjects.[10]

An important corollary to this is that this "necessary gathering" before whom the spectacle unfolds is not simply present in an indifferent way, but rather "takes part" (although not in any direct, active sense) in the spectacle by *sharing* it. It is essential for sovereignty that attention be paid *to the sovereign*, that the spectacle of his or her appearance be shared. In other words, those before whom the monarch appears must in turn affirm that they are in some way sharing the spectacle that unfolds before them. There must be some *confirmation* of the fact that what is taking place is shared by all those gathered —and is, indeed, the very reason for the gathering. Unlike Narcissus, who gazes

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[10]Greenblatt does note that "the play of authority depends upon spectators," but he underscores that this dependence was concealed from the spectators themselves: "the performance is made to seem entirely beyond the control of those whose 'imaginary forces' actually confer upon it its significance and force" (Greenblatt 1988: 65). My point is not so much about who has "control" over the "imaginary forces" inherent in such a scene —indeed, I do not think that such forces can be controlled by one authority. Rather, I want to argue that "visibility-to-others" is itself, in this context, constitutive of sovereign authority. I return to this question shortly.

upon himself in solitude[11], and unlike the philosopher immersed in isolated contemplation, the theater is characterized by the fact that the "vision" in question is shared by a plurality, by an audience which is gathered together through the attraction of what they see. While there can be no doubt that Elizabethan statecraft depended upon a kind of "compelling visibility," it is important to underscore the *communal, shared* nature of this visibility. For Elizabeth's authority is a direct effect of her temporal appearance to *others* — others who, in turn, somehow make clear that they share, or take part, in the spectacle.

A productive way of understanding this decline of "theatrical" sovereignty in *Macbeth* is to look at it from the perspective of "hospitality." First, because hospitality is a pervasive problem in the play, and a productive lens through which to analyze *Macbeth*'s troubling of sovereignty; and, second, because scenes of hospitality were explicitly linked in this period to the phenomenon of "theatrical" sovereignty.

As many have noted, there is in the Renaissance a discernible sense that the sovereign only emerges through a constitutive exhibition to a community of spectators who share the vision of their appearance; namely, a relation of mutual appearance or display.[12] The structure of such scenes is particularly visible in scenes of hospitality —progresses, pageants and the like.

As a guiding thread, therefore, I propose that we take, as a privileged instance of Elizabethan and Jacobean spectacle, a royal progress. Beginning with the example of a royal progress is important, I think, in order to recall that theatricality was not restricted to the confines of a playhouse or court, but is rather evident also in such communal events as royal banquets, or hospitable gatherings.[13] Indeed, hospitality is a useful way to characterize this theatrical constitution of the sovereign for it makes clear both the temporality and the plural nature of the scene. Moreover, these scenes will help us to understand the specific ways in which the sovereign distinguishes him- or herself in relation to a gathering of others by playing the role of *host*. Indeed, as I will argue especially when I turn to *Macbeth*, the position of the host at a gathering will

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[11]Indeed, Ovid's telling of the Narcissus myth emphasizes the absolute solitude of Narcissus' folly. Ovid sets the scene where "no bird or beast or falling branch" had ever touched the ground: "There was a clear pool... where shepherds had never made their way; no goats that pasture on the mountains, no cattle had ever come there" (Ovid 1955: 85).

[12]This is the prevailing thesis, or assumption, of nearly every scholarly work dealing with early modern sovereignty over the past thirty years.

[13]Roy Strong has identified three "categories" of royal spectacles in Elizabethan England: royal entries or progresses, indoor entertainments, and exercises of arms. I will focus on the first two, grouping them under the more general rubric of "hospitality" (Strong 1973: 23).

prove a useful way to consider the theatrical appearance, or emergence, of the sovereign.

In *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, we read Richard Tottill's description of Elizabeth's progress through the City of London to Westminster on January 14, 1558, the day before her coronation. It is the first time (of many) that the accounts collected by John Nichols refer to Elizabeth as "soveraigne," since in this passage she is about to become Queen. We do not need to apply the word "theatrical" to the scene ourselves; for the text makes the connection plain:

> ...if a man shoulde say well, he could not better tearme the Citie of London that time, than a stage wherin was shewed the wonderfull spectacle, of a noble hearted Princesse towards her most loving People, and the People's exceeding comfort in beholding so worthy a Soverainge. (Nichols, 1823: 38-9)

Of course, one finds many analogous descriptions in Nichols' account; I have chosen Tottill's for the way in which the words "stage" and "spectacle" are employed.[14] For in this passage, we get a sense of the way in which the theatrical metaphor was used to describe the sharing of a political spectacle.

In addition to the importance of the plurality —namely, of Elizabeth's "display" being a visible exposure *to others* —Tottill's description helps us to understand the peculiar way in which this visibility functioned as a means through which the Queen and the population could *recognize* one another. This recognition, in turn, amounted to binding the Queen's visible person to her name and title —connecting the title "Ladye theyr Quene" with the "viewe" of her person. This is a subtle process. Welcoming the Queen *as Queen* to one's township required an implicit identification of Elizabeth's visible person with the title —and authority— of the monarch. This is why ceremonies of hospitality were a favored form of what we are calling "theatrical" display. For, welcoming someone's "person" also means that one welcomes the name and title with which that person is announced. The hospitable scene, in other words, was a means through which Elizabeth was able to connect, in a public and unmistakable way, her visible body to her name.

Now *Macbeth* is, in unmistakable ways, a play about hosting and being hosted; a play of guests who come when invited, and ghosts, apparitions and witches who come and go regardless of invitation. At the opening of the play Macbeth, returning victorious from battle, is welcomed by a grateful King Duncan —whose role as sovereign in the play is, indeed, introduced through his

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[14]Gordon Kipling cites this same passage in a recent article, however he attributes it to Richard Mulcaster (Kipling 1997: 155).

"playing host" to Macbeth. The fact that this welcome takes place on a battlefield and not, as we might expect, in Duncan's castle, underscores the way in which sovereignty emerges, and is confirmed, through the temporal unfolding of the scene itself rather than the location of the scene.[15]

However, things quickly turn out to be more complex. Whereas displays of hospitality functioned conventionally in the period, as I argued a moment ago, to confirm the referential stability between "royal title" and "visible presence," in *Macbeth* scenes of hospitality more often take place *as* that very identification and recognition.[16] Consider, for instance, the attention given to *naming* in the opening scenes of hospitality in the play. Macbeth, recall, is greeted with the title "Thane of Cawdor" —as he says, "dressed in borrowed robes." ("No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive / —Go pronounce his present death / And with his former title greet Macbeth," 1.2.65-7). Likewise, Malcolm is renamed Prince of Cumberland upon his arrival at Duncan's court. Rather than being confirmed by the welcome, the connections between a person and a name or title are instead *established* through extensions of hospitality. Macbeth, Banquo and Malcolm are successively welcomed to the court with new names:

> Sons, kinsmen, Thanes,
> And you whose places are nearest, know,
> We will establish our estate upon
> Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
> The Prince of Cumberland; which honour must
> Not unaccompanied invest him only,
> But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
> On all deservers...
> And bind us further to you (1.4.35-43)

If such scenes were conventionally intended to confirm the connection between name and the person, then what does it mean for the scene of hospitality to take place as that very naming? It becomes unclear here whether the scene of hospitality begins with the prior fixity of the identities involved, or whether these identities are in fact conferred through the scene itself. Which, of course, leads us to wonder if there is, in fact, a sovereign self, or secure host or guest, prior to the unfolding of the scene itself.

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[15]After all, Elizabeth's sovereignty was confirmed through hospitable displays even when she was not literally at her home. It perhaps goes without saying that this particular sort of confirmation is not specific to Elizabethan England, but is still a feature of state receptions and diplomatic practices today.

[16]Rosse and Macduff later equate sovereignty with the act of being named: "Then 'tis most like / The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth. / He's already nam'd, and gone to Scone/ To be invested" (2.4.30).

Such questions are not fortuitous if we recall again that the extension of hospitality is intimately bound up with the concept of identity and sovereignty, as Benveniste teaches us. What if —contrary to what we know about the progresses of Elizabeth and James— scenes of hospitality did not unfold as the neat connection between a person and their title? In other words, what if sovereignty is not confirmed by such displays, but is rather an effect of the scene itself? For indeed, social positions at the opening of *Macbeth* do not neatly precede the scenes in which they appear, but are rather changed by them.

It would in fact appear as though there is no security for the sovereign at all in *Macbeth*, particularly when he finds himself a guest at Macbeth's castle. In addition to everything else Benveniste tells us about hospitality, he reminds us that the Latin *hostis*, which designated both host and stranger, is also the root of the word "hostility."[17] And, given the treatment of guests in *Macbeth*, it is perhaps no surprise that "hospitality" and "hostility" share the same origins. Recall that Lady Macbeth, as hostess, welcomes "the fatal entrance of Duncan under [their] battlements" by instructing Macbeth to *play* the good host in order to hide their intentions:

> ... bear welcome in your eye
> Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
> Must be provided for. (1.5.64-8)

The sinister foreboding of these instructions underscores not only the violent intentions of the hosts, but also the manifest theatricality or "display" of such scenes. A "welcome," in Lady Macbeth's formulation, is nothing more than "display;" and therein lies its violent potential. As everyone familiar with the play knows, the King is "provided for" in the bloodiest way. The "false" welcome that Lady Macbeth extends to Duncan upon his arrival reveals the *duplicity* of the scene —the co-habitance of hospitality and hostility.

> Lady Macbeth: All our service
> In every point twice done, and then done double,
> Were poor and single business, to contend
> Against those honours deep and broad, wherewith

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[17]This violence adheres not only in "hospitality," but is in fact constitutive of sovereignty as well. As Walter Benjamin argued, in what may as well be a remark on *Macbeth*, the violence that founds the law is finally indistinguishable from the violence that preserves it. The juridical order, he writes, "is not an end immune and independent from violence, but one necessarily and intimately bound up with it" (Benjamin 1978: 197-8). In his discussion of Benjamin's "Critique of Violence," Giorgio Agamben identifies this "violence which founds the law" with the Carl Schmitt's notion of sovereignty as the suspension of the law within the law. The sovereign's position is, he argues, one from which the violence which founds the law, and the violence which preserves it are finally indistinguishable. See Agamben (1998: 40-1, 66-8).

Your majesty loads our house...

Duncan: ...Fair and noble hostess,
We are your guests tonight (1.4.14-25)

Her welcome is duplicitous in the truest sense: deceitful because double. The hospitality of her words reveals that the King will get more than he bargained for ("All our service / In every point twice done, and then done double...").[18] Of course, the King believes in the security of his welcome, since the political sovereignty of the throne is itself the center of this belief. Again, as monarch he is also the "sovereign" host —even when he is not, literally, at home. Duncan's first words to Lady Macbeth teasingly remind her of this:

... honored hostess!
The love that follows us sometimes is our trouble,
Which we still thank as love. Herein *I* teach *you*
How *you* shall bid God 'ield *us* for *your* pains,
And thank *us* for *your* trouble (1.6.10-14, my italics)

Many, like A.R. Braunmuller, have tended to read these lines as simply an instance of Duncan being "torturously polite" *(*Braunmuller 1994). However, I would suggest that the implicit connection between sovereignty and hospitable display, so unmistakable in this historical context, might lead us to interpret these lines as reflecting Duncan's belief in the bond between juridical sovereignty and a corresponding position as "host." It should not go unnoticed that nearly every word that King Duncan utters in the play relates in some way to welcoming subjects, or to being himself received. His role is to speak of hospitality, to sanction its extension. Even as Lady Macbeth's guest, the King's magnanimity presents him to his audience as "sovereign" host. Indeed, the last thing that Duncan does before going to sleep for the last time is to offer "largess" to Lady Macbeth in gratitude for her hospitality, an act which ought to make his passage that much more secure, as well as reinforce the security of his hierarchical position.[19]

He [the King] hath been in unusual pleasure, and
Sent forth great largess to your offices,

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[18]Incidentally, the word "double" recurs with an uncanny frequency in *Macbeth.* The witches: "Double, double, toil and trouble..." (4.1.10); Also, Macbeth's remarks about Duncan that "He's here in a double trust: / First as I am his kinsman and his subject, / Strong both against the deed; then as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself" (1.7.12-16).

[19]"Largess," according to the *OED* definition is generosity offered by someone of high rank or social status to someone of "inferior" rank or position. The presence of that word, therefore, underscores the King's mastery, even when he is the "guest." For more on the history of the term, see Fiske (1923: 210-12).

> This diamond he greets your wife withal,
> By the name of most kind hostess... (2.1.13-16)

In short, the King not only sanctions conventional hospitality, but he presides over it as if he were to do nothing else. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the regicide which follows also implies a disintegration of the order of hospitality which preserves communal order.

Before killing Duncan, Macbeth reflects upon the regicide in precisely these terms: [20]

> He's here in a double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife myself. (1.7.12-16)

Thus, the catastrophe is both that a sovereign has been assassinated, *and* that the "rule" of hospitality has been breached.[21] Lady Macbeth, in the play's most ironic line, responds to the news of the regicide for which she herself, as hostess and accomplice, is doubly responsible by crying: "Woe, Alas! / What, in our house?" (2.3.88-89).

The link between sovereignty and displays of hospitality extends beyond Duncan to Macbeth's rule as well. True to form, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth inaugurate their reign as King and Queen by hosting a dinner party, a party whose purpose is at once to confirm Macbeth's role as King / host as well as to murder Banquo and his son as guests.[22] Macbeth greets Banquo with an invitation:

Macbeth: Here's our chief guest.

Lady Macbeth: If he had been forgotten,
          It had been *as a gap* in our great feast...

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[20]That Duncan was murdered as a "gueste" was another one of the events of the play which stood out to Simon Forman. "And Mackbeth contrived to kill Duncan, & thorowe the persuasion of his wife did that night Murder the kinge in his own Castell, beinge his gueste." See Knight (1951: 134).

[21]The obligation to protect one's guest is regularly mentioned in writings of the period dealing with "hospitality" or generosity to strangers. For instance, Caleb Dalechamp wrote in *Christian Hospitalitie* that "In faithful protection for a true hoste must not onely abstain from doing wrong to his guests, according to that of Solomon, Proverbs 3.29, but also must suffer none to hurt them during their abode with him" (Dalechamp 1632: 29).

[22]There is a frequently recurring connection in *Macbeth* between feasting and murder: "this even-handed justice / Commends the ingredients of our poisoned chalice / To our own lips." See also Knight (1951: 136), where he compares the banquet scene in *Macbeth* to the Greek legend of King Phineus and the Harpies.

Macbeth: To-night we hold a solemn supper, sir,
      And I'll request your presence.

Banquo: Let your Highness
      Command upon me, to the which my duties
      Are with a most indissoluble tie
      For ever knit...

Macbeth: Fail not our feast.

Banquo: My lord, I will not. (3.1.11-18, 28-29, my emphasis)

I note, in passing, that the violence perpetrated by Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is repeatedly figured in the play as a kind of perverse hosting. Each time that Lady Macbeth and Macbeth plot a murder, they simultaneously plan the evening's hospitality (see *Macbeth* 1.5). At several points they withdraw together from the others under the pretense of preparing the evening's hospitality, only to plot a murder.[23] The proximity of hospitality and hostility, of welcoming and violence, is more than just an etymological coincidence. For the inextricability of hospitality and hostility guarantees the absolute unknowability one's host or guest and their intentions: "There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face" (1.4.11-12).

In the "banquet scene" we can see most clearly the extent to which *Macbeth* mimics and undoes the features of sovereign "display" I outlined earlier. Or, moreover, we see the extent to which "theatrical" sovereignty precedes its juridical determination.

Macbeth speaks first, connecting the "degree(s)" of his guests with their position at his table in a way which confirms their position in relation to him.

You know your own degrees; sit down:
At first and last, the hearty welcome (3.4.1-2)

Clearly, Macbeth is rather uneasy about his own tenuous position within the social hierarchy he seeks at once to legitimate and confirm, having ascended to the throne under suspicious circumstances. This uneasiness, in fact, began when he was first addressed as "Thane of Cawdor" by the Weird Sisters. Here however his uneasiness is directly linked to his position as host, which, like sovereignty, is acquired only through the temporal unfolding of the performance. Macbeth attempts to "mingle with society, / And play the humble host," —making clear that the balance of power hinges upon the centrality of his sovereignty. To this effect, he places himself at the center of the table:

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[23]See 1.5.59-62, and "To make society / The sweeter welcome, we will keep ourself / Till supper time alone" (3.1.41-3). Both times a murder is arranged. See also 1.5.64-71, and 3.1.45-142.

> Both sides are even; here I'll sit i'th'midst.
> Be large in mirth; anon, we'll drink a measure
> The table round. (3.4.10-12)

At first, and for a moment, Macbeth is the fulcrum, the middle, the center of the gathering. Courtesy-manuals of the period indeed attest to the fact that one's position at a table directly reflected one's social rank.[24] We might also think of Stephen Orgel's description of the King's physical position during court performances. Orgel writes:

> In a theater... there is only one...perfect place in the hall from which the illusion achieves its fullest effect. At court performances this is where the king sat, and the audience around him at once became a living emblem of the structure of the court. The closer one sat to the monarch, the "better" one's place was, an index of one's status, and more directly, to the degree of favor one enjoyed. (Orgel 1975: 10-11)

Benveniste as well argues that such "placing" is precisely the means through which the identity of the self (*ipse*) attains the character of "sovereignty" or mastery. He writes:

> For an adjective meaning "himself" to develop into the meaning of "master" there is one necessary condition: there must be a circle of persons subordinated to a central personage... to such an extent that he is its summation. (Benveniste 1973: 74)

What is decisive, therefore, in the fact that Macbeth places himself at the center of the table is that in doing so, he distinguishes himself from the others while nonetheless remaining one among them. The structure of the "social" gathering here is thus analogous to Schmidtt's "paradox" of juridical sovereignty, whereby the sovereign both belongs to the juridical order and yet is nevertheless outside it (Schmidtt 1985: 13). However, in this scene Macbeth's sovereignty is, significantly, not so much juridical as it is bound up with a "public" performance. As with Elizabeth and James, it is Macbeth's self-display, his appearance in the midst of others, which ought to mark his appearance as sovereign in this scene.

However, it is precisely this social nature of sovereignty that Macbeth fails to comprehend, and indeed fails to fulfill. Rather than attend to those around him, Macbeth leaves them to converse with the murderers. Believing Banquo and Fleance to be a greater threat to his juridical position than his absence from the banquet, Macbeth here reveals that he does not grasp the importance of his

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[24]Placement according to social-rank was a feature of nearly all courtesy-books of the period which contain instructions for hosting guests. See Furnivall (1868: 115-99).

being present to others. By contrast, Lady Macbeth seems well aware of the importance of the banquet; she chastises him for his inattentive hospitality:

> My royal lord
> You do not give the cheer. The feast is sold
> That is not often vouch'd, while 'tis a-making,
> 'Tis given with welcome. To feed were best at home;
> From thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony;
> Meeting were bare without it. (3.4.31-6)

Or, again:

> My worthy lord,
> Your noble friends do lack you (3.4.82-3)

The whole point of the "display," as we noted at the outset, is that the sovereign appear before a gathering, a gathering which likewise comes together through the shared apprehension of the sovereign. When Lady Macbeth later notes that Macbeth's behavior "spoil[s] the pleasure of the time," she underscores the extent to which Macbeth's failure as a host signals both his failure to make himself *present* to others, and his consequent failure to give shape to the gathering.

Indeed, in the "banquet scene" it is not the spectacle of Macbeth-the-monarch at all, but rather a quite different sort of appearance, which takes center stage.

The Ghost of Banquo *enters and sits in* Macbeth's *place*

The "gap in our great feast," which Lady Macbeth had earlier feared, indeed surfaces to "spoil the pleasure of the time" (3.4.97). Banquo's Ghost, the stage directions make explicit, does not simply enter and take a seat anywhere among the other guests; nor does the Ghost hover or float about like a phantom without fixing itself to a place.[25] Instead, it enters and "sits in Macbeth's place," effectively taking Macbeth's place away from him.

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[25]This is how the stage-directions appear in the First Folio, the first publication of the Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Further proof of their accuracy can be found, again, in Simon Forman, who devotes several lines to express his and the audience's shock at the Ghost's entrance. He writes: Macbeth "began to speake of noble Banco and wish that he wer there. And as he thus did, standing up to drincke a Carouse to him, the ghost of Banco came and sate down in his chaeire behind him. And he turninge about to sit down againe sawe the goste of banco, which flouted him so, that he fell into a great passion of fear and fury, vtterynge many wordes about his murder..."

Kenneth Muir, in his introduction to the Arden edition of *Macbeth*, notes that "There are references to Banquo's Ghost in *The Puritaine* (4.3.89):
    and in stead of a lester, welle ha the ghost ith white sheete sit
    at upper end a'th'table...
and in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (5.1.2208)

Moreover, Macbeth loses his position, he is dis-placed, *before* he has a chance to claim this place as his own. The Ghost not only enters uninvited, but —unlike the Ghost in *Hamlet*, for instance— enters unnoticed as well. It is only *after* Macbeth finishes toasting his guests, after toasting to the absence of Banquo, after the Ghost is in his seat, that he realizes that his chair has been taken. Macbeth invokes Banquo's name ("Were the grac'd person of our Banquo present") *before* sitting down.

Macbeth: The table's full.

Lennox: Here's a place reserv'd, Sir.

Macbeth: Where?

Lennox: Here, my good Lord. What is't that moves your Highness?

Macbeth: Which of you have done this?

Lords: What, my good lord?

Macbeth: Thou canst not say, I did it: never shake
        Thy gory locks at me.

Rosse: Gentlemen, rise; his Highness is not well. (3.4.45-51)

Macbeth's place is therefore usurped, *before* he can claim it, by Banquo's ghost, the ghost of the very one who had to be vanquished in order that the seat be preserved in the first place. ("There is none but (Banquo) / Whose being I do fear; and under him / My genius is rebuk'd, as it was said / Mark Antony's was by Caesar," 3.1.53-6).

Furthermore, I would suggest that the appearance of Banquo's ghost robs Macbeth not only of his "middle" seat at the table, but of his "sovereignty" as well. The usurpation of Macbeth's seat by this uninvited guest brings on Macbeth's "strange infirmity" by exceeding the foundation of juridical sovereignty, namely, that the sovereign (whether a state or person) ought to be in control of all entry into the "house" or realm. This is not to say that there cannot be unforeseen guests, but simply that the juridical sovereign-host ought to retain final authority over who is allowed the status of guest, invited or not.

When though art at thy Table with thy friends
Merry in heart, and fild with swelling wine,
Il'e come in midst of all pride and mirth,
Invisible to all men but thy selfe,
And whisper such a sad tale in thine eare,
Shall make thee let the Cuppe fall from thy hand,
And stand as mute and pale as Death it selfe.
See, *Macbeth*, edited by Kenneth Muir, xvii.

Lady Macbeth soon concedes that Macbeth "spoils the pleasure of the time." The Ghost's repeated entry and Macbeth's staccatoed madness serve not only to usurp Macbeth's position as sovereign, but the Ghost returns as a party crasher who "displaces the mirth" ("You have *displac'd* the mirth, broke the meeting with most admired disorder," 3.4.108-9). The cheer of hospitality is broken along with the *ipse* of its host. Whereas, at the beginning of the scene, Macbeth had invoked convention by re-confirming the positions and placement of his guests, the scene ends with the utter dissolution of this convention. As if to underscore this loss of communal order, Lady Macbeth dispels the gathering, crying: "Stand not upon the order of your going, / But go at once" (3.4.118-9).

Thus, there are two dissolutions: the disintegration of Macbeth's sovereignty is accompanied by the dispersion of the gathering. The first is, importantly, signaled by the second. Macbeth's failure as sovereign, in other words, is his failure to hold a gathering together —to form, as it were, a community around his presence.

Macbeth's failure to emerge as sovereign in the banquet scene is first of all a *social* failure, his failure to appear before, and with, others. What Macbeth loses in this scene is, of course, not so much his juridical authority, which he maintains, to some degree, until his death. Rather, the scene makes clear the extent to which Macbeth's juridical title and authority are insufficient. By itself, Macbeth's authority does not give shape and form to the community gathered before him. If it did, he could have simply commanded the others to affirm that they too see Banquo's Ghost. Instead, we come to understand that sovereignty is not solely a political problem, but rather that it is a social problem: namely, the way in which one emerges as a singular, exceptional being *through* a constitutive relation to others. It is this relation which Macbeth fails to fulfill.

Sovereignty thus reveals itself in Shakespeare's tragedy, prior the juridical order which was to take shape in the seventeenth-century, as a theatrical relation with others. The sovereign is one who *shares* him / herself with others; a sharing which serves to gather the community, like a banquet around its host — "Meeting were bare without it" (3.4.36)— but where the emergence of the host depends equally upon the event of the gathering. In such a scene, the political body has become inseparable from the body that eats and drinks, indistinguishable from the lived time shared with others. Macbeth's failure as host, therefore, can be understood as an unmistakable sign of the increasing untenability, or perhaps impossibility, of this "theatrical" sovereign.

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