

## FUNCTION OF FATE/SPACE/TIME IN THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE OF *MACBETH*

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In each genre, time “thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history.

—Michael Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*

To beguile the time,  
Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,  
Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower,  
But be the serpent under't.<sup>1</sup>

I am settled, and bend up  
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.  
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:  
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

—William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

### Abstract

This paper aims to scrutinize how time thickens and takes on flesh and how it becomes visible in relation to space and history in the tragedy of *Macbeth*. My argument is Macbeth, embodying time, gets into rivalry with fate, which alongside determines both the historical and also politics of power in the framework of the play. In relation to temporal/spatial and power stricken conflicts and Macbeth's detachment from

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<sup>1</sup> William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 1.5.61-64, in *The New Penguin Shakespeare* (London: Penguin Books, 1967), p. 67. All references to *Macbeth* will be to this edition.

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İnceleme Makalesi

culture/civilization, Macbeth starts to lose his manliness attached to his brave deeds. This gradual loss of manliness, coherence in his bravery and disintegration in his character also reminds us of the beginning of James VI/I's ascension to the throne in English monarchy and his declaration of the Act of Union of Two Crowns. Since Scotland is represented by Macbeth and England by Malcolm, we see the failure of Act of Union in the play both through the acts of Macbeth and Malcolm's uncertain future because of the escape of Fleance. Thus, in this paper, by referring to Bakhtin, Michel de Certeau, Lefebvre and the historical sources on the Act of Union of Crowns, Macbeth's state of mind in relation to time space and fate will be scrutinized.

**Keywords:** *Macbeth*, Manliness, Fate, Space, Time

## MACBETH'İN SİYASİ SÖYLEMİNDE KADER/UZAY/ZAMANIN İŞLEVİ

### Özet

Bu makale, *Macbeth* tragedyasında zamanın nasıl ete bürünüp mekân ve tarih ilişkisi içinde görünür hale geldiğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Oyunda zamanın rolünü üstlenen Macbeth, oyunun hem tarihsel hem de iktidar politikasını belirleyen kader ile rekabet içine girer. Macbeth zamansal/mekânsal iktidar çatışmaları ve kültür/uygarlıktan kopukluğu ile bağlantılı olarak, metnin başında da referans verilmiş olan cesur kahramanlıklarına bağlı olan erkekliğini kaybetmeye başlar. Bu mertlik kaybı ve karakterindeki parçalanma, bize James VI/I'in İngiliz monarşisinde tahta çıkışının başlangıcını ve İskoçya ve İngiltere tahtlarını birleştiren yasayı ilan etmesini hatırlatır çünkü Macbeth İskoçya'yı, Malcolm ise İngiltere'yi temsil etmekte olup bu birleşmenin imkânsız olduğunu gerek Macbeth üzerinden gerekse tahta çıkan Malcolm'ın, Fleance'ın kaçması ile, belirsiz olan geleceği simgeler. Bu makalede, Bakhtin, Michel de Certeau, Lefebvre ve tarihsel kaynaklara dayanarak Macbeth'in zaman, mekân ve kader ile olan ilişkisi tartışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Macbeth*, Erkeklik, Kader, Mekân, Zaman

This paper aims to scrutinize how time thickens and takes on flesh and how it becomes visible in relation to space and history in the tragedy of Macbeth. My argument is Macbeth, embodying time, gets into rivalry with fate, which alongside determines both the historical and also politics of power in the framework of the play. Macbeth's destiny is closely tied to time space. Connectedness of temporal and spatial relationship, as named chronotope literally time-space by Bakhtin, is strengthened by the inclusion of fate into the constructive trinity for the life cycle of Macbeth. Bakhtin referred to the "literary

artistic chronotope” where “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole”, in such a way that the chronotope could be seen as “a formally constitutive category of literature” (1981, p. 84). If space is the area/room to do something [in] the period of time, places in the play of *Macbeth* symbolize Macbeth’s actions in relation to time (himself) and fate. Only to address Macbeth’s deeds in connection with time space would be inadequate to analyze his imperial scheme although geographical and temporal landmarks are shaped by and shape the social, cultural, and political practices that occur in them. In *Macbeth*, fate is also added to geographical and temporal landmarks to determine the sociocultural and political discourse of the text. In the play the bleak and barren space the weird sisters occupy turns into a place that very much becomes both the originator (producer) and the product of Macbeth’s deeds, the issue that will be analysed in this paper. His ambiguity, hesitation in the beginning of the text is also the result and the reason of his in-betweenness of places: the place of wilderness and the places of civilization. His future (his being named as the Thane of Cawdor because of his bravery against Norway as will be announced in the very first act and his being the king as the result of regicide) is already told to Macbeth in the beginning of the play. Thus, rather than cause and effect dialogue among fate, time and space, we see non-linear dialogical discourse depending on effect and cause. And this ambiguous, uncertain in-betweenness is very much in relation to the meaning of space and what space stands for both in the context of the play and in its tragic hero, Macbeth. Closely interwoven with the theme of the play, the framework of the play is already determined by the weird sisters who are reminiscent of Moiras (fate sisters) in Greek Mythology. Moreover, there is also the space the weird sisters occupy that produces the place and the fate of both Banquo and Macbeth.

The differences between space and place have long been discussed and tried to be differentiated by many critics. When space’s etymological root which has its relation to “time” is considered within this differentiation, the result becomes more complicated since space is from Latin *spatium* “room, area, distance, stretch of time”, from early 14c. as a “place”, also “amount of time, extent of time” (Harper, “Etymology of space”). Thus, space includes both time and place within the very word itself. Alongside the etymological root of space, Michel de Certeau in *[T]he Practice of Everyday Life* attempts to differentiate the terms: place/space by stating:

A place (lieu) is 'the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things in the same location ... The law of the "proper" rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its "proper" and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions. It implies an indication of 'stability'. Space (espace), on the other hand, is 'composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it ... in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualisation, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts (1984, p. 117).

"In relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualisation"; similarly, in the play, space alongside with the appearance of the weird sisters in the beginning of the play asserts the ambiguity with both their words and appearances:

First Witch: When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Second Witch: When the hurly-burly's done,

When the battle's lost and won.

Third Witch: That will be ere the set of sun.

First Witch: Where the place?

Second Witch: Upon the heath

...

All: Fair is foul, and foul is fair.

Hover through the fog and filthy air (I.1.1-10).

This opening scene of the play in which witches appear represents "an anarchic, richly ambiguous zone both in and out of official society: they live in their own world but intersect with Macbeth's" (Eagleton, 2000, p. 3). Thus, the clash between nature and civilization starts and continues in accordance with the prophecies of the weird sisters. Utterances on time scale, in this scene, are determined by natural implications. Although nature is represented by the witches and the civilization by Macbeth, it turns out to be vice versa. In the beginning of the second book of *Physics* (II, p. 1), Aristotle defines nature as the essence of things, what they are made of and entail their destiny. Fate/weird sisters/space become the essence of the things that initiate the events and time joins them. Macbeth, who represents time, interferes with the natural flow of the events, thus what is

natural, what is the essence of the things becomes cruelly bloody, since the space they occupy becomes place when Macbeth starts to act according to prophecies to fulfil them. Macbeth from that time on becomes the representative of time, savagery, over-ambition and Scotland. Macbeth starts to practice the prophecies, first by revealing the prophecies to Lady Macbeth in his letter. Space turned into place becomes the practiced place that produces the over-ambitious man: Macbeth. “Nothing is possible”, Lefebvre urges “without the desire and demand for the impossible”. Thus, “imagination” must strive “to seize power” (1991b, p. 66). And imagination for Macbeth is what gives him both the hesitation and the courage for his upcoming deeds that are seen in his words throughout the play.

Place is very significant in determining one’s own place, identity, culture, politics. Hence, witches’ ambiguous looks with beards, “so withered and so wild in their attire,/That look not like the inhabitants o’the earth” (I.3.39-40) are in accordance with the eerie air/atmosphere into which they vanish, melt. Even Banquo is unable to determine whether they are real or illusory:

Were such things here as we do speak about?  
Or have we eaten on the insane root  
That takes the reason prison? (I.3.82-84)

In the above mentioned lines, Banquo questions the existence of the weird sisters as the product of either illusion or reason. While Banquo is more cautious and sceptical, Macbeth is already overwhelmed by the witches that greet him first as the Thane of Glamis, then Cawdor and lastly the king. These prophetic greetings initiate the process of losing the interaction with his identity as the loyal and brave Thane of Scotland. As Michael Gardiner observes,

[F]or Bakhtin, human consciousness is not a unified whole, but always exists in a tensile, conflict-ridden relationship with other consciousnesses, in a constant alterity between self and other. In fact, a fully self-sufficient and isolated consciousness cannot possibly exist: *the every* process of acquiring self-consciousness from birth to maturity is, in Bakhtin’s eyes, utterly dependent upon discursive interaction with another ‘I’ (1992, p. 28).

That “another I” for Macbeth becomes the eye of the weird sisters from the very first moment he sees and talks to them. What is complex and contradictory is that he starts to act out in accordance with the words of them. On the other hand, he tries to assume the

role of time to control the fate of not only himself but also of Duncan, Banquo, and his son Fleance. The fact that he loses the interaction with his own self “I” results in his focusing on the time ignoring his being controlled by fate. Temporal-spatial interrelatedness role in the destiny of Macbeth that takes him to his catastrophic end brings the unity to the chaotic plot construction. The reason of the play’s opening scene with the weird sisters who are the representatives of fate brings forth unearthly and ambiguous bodies, and their dialogic interaction with Macbeth stimulates him to assume the ambiguous power to direct time. In this case, Macbeth himself becomes time and attributes himself to the divine power to control time, but he ignores the fact that it was destiny, which characterizes another divine power and is represented by women (the weird sisters), and he is ruled by this power. In other words, Macbeth’s downfall had already started when he thought that he could get ahead of fate. Though this paper aims at analysing Macbeth as the embodiment of time in relation to spatial connectedness, fate is introduced at the very same moment of the introduction of the temporal and spatial framework of the text. Thus, we understand that fate will be playing its significant role in relation to time space that will entrap Macbeth not only in the spatial discourse but also in the political discourse. When it comes to the political discourse of the play, time space of the play is closely controlled by the inclusion of fate that constitutes not the Holy Trinity but holly<sup>2</sup> trinity because rather than establishing a connection or unity among them, there appears the ambiguity, over-ambition, murder, blood in the imperial theme. The relation of time space to the political discourse of Macbeth and the inclusion of prophecies and magic are in connection with both temporal and spatial knots that both tie and untie the narrative alongside with the political background of the play. Although political discourse of the play could be interpreted through various perspectives, Macbeth “who embodies the elements of past and present anxiety about the Scot, clearly reflects the position of most English tracts on the Union, which portray the Scot as inferior to the English, encroaching on the property of others, and requiring containment within an appropriate hierarchical scheme” (2007, p. 385). The tragedy of *Macbeth* was associated with James VI/I because he was keen on magic and supernatural powers in his personal

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<sup>2</sup> The Druids regarded holly as a symbol of **fertility and eternal life**, thought it had magical powers. The weird sisters’ prophecies and their unworldly appearances push Macbeth into the world of illusions and magic.

life and experienced the political turmoil and the conflicts that stemmed from the Act of the Union of Two Crowns in 1603. He had the strong belief that he had been called to rule the country by God's command instead of the will of the people. As such, he usually disputed Parliament over the control of the country's government. As Arpine Mızıkyan in her dissertation clearly asserts, since James I believed in the Divine Right of Kings he admitted that his power as King had been given to him by God and that his desires had the same force as those of God Himself. The Commons should only follow his commands instead of advising him (2006, p. 141). Similarly, Macbeth also assumes the role of God and rather than establishing order in the kingdom, his actions more result in chaotic and ambiguous situation. Jonathan Baldo describes *Macbeth* as a "riddling play" that links Scottish and English histories but also conveys "how futile it will be to unite [with] this new past, suddenly bequeathed to them with the accession of the Scottish monarch." (2008, p. 99). Shakespeare's unstable, ambiguous Macbeth is defined according to Scottish perspective that will later be revealed to be failing in its union with the English, because the play was written three years after James VI of Scotland's crowning as James I of England. King James I envisioned an integration of the two kingdoms that far surpassed the unity brought about by the Union of the Crowns in 1603. This vision was not fulfilled. Instead, the renegotiation of the nation that took place in Parliament over the next four years was marked by dissension culminating in the failure of the Union project in the summer of 1607 (2007, p. 380). The turmoil experienced by both Scotland and England is reflected through ambiguous illusionary power-stricken Macbeth who fails to be in dialogue with the self and the other/time/space and fate. To be in rivalry against all these brings the destruction of ambiguous and ambitious Macbeth. He cannot create a concrete whole because of the lack of vision on seeing the spatial and temporal indicators.

The Scottish chronicler, John of Fordun, writes in the fourteenth century that "the manners and customs of the Scots vary with the diversity of their speech ... The people of the coast are of domestic and civilised habits... The Highlanders and people of the islands, on the other hand, are a savage and untamed race, rude and independent." (1872, p. 38) and James VI/I writes, "as for the highlands, I shortly comprehend them all in two sorts of people: the one, that dwelleth in our main land, that are barbarous for the most part, and yet mixed with some show of civility; the other, that dwelleth in the Isles and are barbarous, without any sort or show of civility." (Lee, 1976, p. 97). Thus, Macbeth seems

to be representing the savage place and savagery with his false I/eye. When Ross gives the account of the murder of Macduff's wife and children, he refers to the act as "savagely":

ROSS: Your castle is surprised; your wife and babes  
*Savagely* slaughter'd: to relate the manner,  
Were, on the quarry of these murder'd deer,  
To add the death of you (IV.3.204-207).

And when he talks to Lady Macduff, he mentions the cruelty, ambiguity, uncertainty that he witnesses in the kingdom:

I dare not speak much further;  
But cruel are the times, when we are traitors  
And do not know ourselves, when we hold rumour  
From what we fear, yet know not what we fear,  
But float upon a wild and violent sea  
Each way and move. I take my leave of you:  
Shall not be long but I'll be here again:  
Things at the worst will cease, or else climb upward  
To what they were before (IV.2.18-26).

This quote does not only refer to Macbeth but to the kingdom that is in between savagery and civilization, chaos and order politically.

As stated earlier, in the beginning of the play, on the account of Macbeth's bravery against Norway, he is described as "brave Macbeth – well he deserves that name - / Disdaining fortune, with his brandished steel" (I.2.16-17). This description belongs to the echo of civilization/culture that appreciates his courage, loyalty, and heroism. However, what is apparent fades and loses its significance and essence just after his road intersects with the witches on a heath. Thus, Macbeth comes closer to the voice of nature both outside and inside; he moves himself away from the centre of civilization. If we remember the quote "in each genre, time "thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movement of time, plot and history (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84), the concretization of the abstract "time" and transferring it to the body enables more interaction and dialogic discourse with space/place and fate in the text of *Macbeth*. Therefore, political discourse of the tragedy of Macbeth becomes



the literary dialogue of the history of the Union of the Crowns in 1603. James I failed to harmonize political cooperation of Scotland and England, to connect them with absolute trust and skilful conduct. According to Maurice Lee, in the spring of 1603, the government of Scotland was very different, with an absentee king, and it took some time for the shaping of the new regime because James VI/I took a lot of important people with him when he went south, including so many officials, and he confidently expected that some form of governmental union would follow closely on the union of the crowns, and that there was no need to make elaborate administrative arrangements for Scotland (1976, p. 42). This absence of authority and order in Scotland could be associated with the absence of order and unity with the murder of Duncan. When two truths are told by the weird sisters, Macbeth thinks of them “as happy prologues to the swelling Act of the imperial theme”. From that moment on he starts to accelerate the time by looking like the time, as dictated by Lady Macbeth: “To beguile the time/Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye,/Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,/But be serpent under’t (I.5.61-64). His consciousness which is supposed to be depending on I consciousness shifts to the eye of first the weird sisters and then Lady Macbeth. The ambiguity and dichotomy marked with the words in the beginning of the play, “fair is foul, foul is fair”, is deepened with the dichotomy between both sides: Lady Macbeth and the weird sisters. Lady Macbeth embodies the space of civilization, on the other hand, the weird sisters occupy the exiled zone. Because Macbeth is in between these zones, limbo, he requires help from both sides. So, what Lady Macbeth does for her husband is not to trigger him into evil but just to serve his deep, dark wishes as he desires. Because after listening to the prophecies of the witches, without any hesitation, Macbeth revealed the “happy prologues” to Lady Macbeth in his letter to seek the assistance from her. Moreover, before the letter, he was very well aware of his dark desires:

Stars, hide your fires;  
Let not light see my black and deep desires.  
The eye wink at the hand, yet let that be  
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see (I.4, 57-60).

Just after this scene ends, we see Lady Macbeth reading the letter on the account of prophecies. Since Macbeth has lots of hesitations because of the fear of failure and his illegitimate thoughts, his lack of paternal power, he cannot declare himself as a powerful,

strong minded, determined man to power as James VI/I does in his first speech in the English parliament on 19 March 1604. James VI/I tried to establish himself as the sole legitimate power in terms of religion, paternal power both in family and the country:

I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawful Wife; I am the Head, and it is my Body; I am the Shepherd, and it is my flocke: I hope therefore no man will be so vnreasonable as to thinke that I that am a Christian King vnder the Gospel, should be a Polygamist and husband to two wiues; that I being the Head, should haue a diuided and monstrous Body; or that being the shepheard to so faire a Flocke ... should have my Flocke parted in two (1994, p. 136).

This transitory period on the Union of the Crowns in 1603 seems to be corresponding to the conflicts in Macbeth's mind and heart. In relation to conflicts and his detachment from culture/civilization/Scotland, he starts to lose his manliness attached to his brave deeds and the reference on seeking the order on the English side is implied at the end of the text, when Malcolm is hailed as the King of Scotland. He says:

We shall not spend a large expense of time  
Before we reckon with your several loves,  
And make us even with you. My thanes and kinsmen,  
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland  
In such an honour named. What's more to do,  
Which would be planted newly with the time,  
As calling home our exiled friends abroad  
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny;  
Producing forth the cruel ministers  
Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen,  
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands  
Took off her life; this, and what needful else  
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,  
We will perform in measure, time and place:  
So, thanks to all at once and to each one,  
Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone (V.6.99-114).

“We will perform in measure, time and place” line solves what is complicated by the weird sisters in relation to time and place. In the public, Malcolm asserts a consistent identity in relation to “measure, time and place” but the consequence of temporal and spatial dis/placement of Macbeth has led to the shattering both of the self and the

kingdom. Shakespeare, through witches which symbolize the supernatural beliefs of James I, introduces the conflict between England and Scotland and the failure of the union is made apparent by the escape of Fleance. The text starts with ambiguity and ends with it again although order seems to be restored. Although Macbeth is a tragic hero, he more seems to be a pathetic character because the framework of the text in relation the characterization of Macbeth as well is determined by the weird sisters, inhabitants of the aerie, barren space representing nature and Macbeth's nature. Time space in this context then gets into rivalry with each other in spite of the fact that space also includes and absorbs time. Thus, the harmony between them ambiguously takes us to what is expected from the play both politically and historically: James VI/I's uniting two crowns and Macbeth's embodiment of time and space both falls and fails day by day.

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