Representation of Hope in Macbeth: Critical Analysis

Thus he hopes to find his security in himself and his deed alone. In a monologue prior to his deed, he explicitly discloses this great wish which he ties to his upcoming crime: “[...] that but this blow / Might be the be-all and the end-all, [...]“ (Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 7, l.4-5). He hence expects that his murder will put an end to his all too high power ambitions, so that he will be able to live a secure and happy life as king.

But shortly before Macbeth's definite decision to commit regicide, “Not even his different senses are in harmony with each other, and Macbeth's rhetorical division of eye and hand seems to express an illusory hope that one can commit a crime without being accountable for it with one's complete person.” (Mehl, p.113, l.1-4): “The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be / Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.“ (Macbeth, Act 1, Scene 4, l.52–53). Thus, absurdly, he hopes to evade the net of consequences for his deed through a split of his personality (see Neis, p.53, l.28-32), but according to Marga Unterstenhöfer, this “hand-eye-opposition” is exactly what supports this process of destruction in Macbeth's mind (see Unterstenhöfer, p.172, l.8-19). Moreover, as for this wish, the terms “eye” and “see” can be metaphorically understood as organs of his imagination.

However, Macbeth's sacrilegious murder of the king carries another hope with it. Namely, he also killed in order to equal the world in which murder exists and in which murder is possible. He did not only commit the murder in the hope of becoming king, but also to affirm himself. In the process, he made a choice between a Macbeth who fears killing – at least, concerning the king1 – and a Macbeth who kills (see Kott, p.117, l.5-9). On the one hand, this is demanded of him by his wife as a proof of his manliness – which she, strangely enough, also understands as a kind of token of love – but on the other hand, Macbeth also challenges himself with it. Ironically, even the Macbeth who has murdered cannot accept his murdering self (see Kott, p.119, l.7-9).

Thus the Macbeth who, after a long period of hesitation, has ultimately killed is already a different person than the one before the deed (see Kott, p.117, l.9-10), for right after his bloody deed he would preferably undo everything again since he obviously only now truly realizes what sheer incredible injustice he has actually committed with it. So he does not even dare anymore to return the bloody daggers to Duncan's sleeping servants in order to smudge them with the king's blood and, thus, blame the murder on them: “I am afraid to think what I have done; / Look on’t again, I dare not.“ (Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 2, l.52–53). Here, for the first time, a change is indicated, then later even the split of his personality2 - “To know my deed, ’twere best not know myself.“ (Macbeth, Act 2, Scene 2, l.74).

Apart from a gain of power, which the usurped kingship would inevitably entail and which he arguably considers as the absolutely highest good due to his ambition that exceeds almost any degree, he also hopes – as already mentioned – for a happy life in perfect security, which mainly consist of the certainty for him that, ultimately, only the witches' prophecies directed towards him will fulfill, but not the ones aimed at Banquo. Hence, for Macbeth, this hope for a bit more quality of life has to culminate in the murder of his friend and companion. This happens as a treacherous contract killing.

He would even be ready to destroy the universe if it only would finally bring him peace – peace in its double perspective, as security and peace of mind (see Rojahn-Deyk, p.211, 31-33). Pathetically, he says: “But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer, / Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep / In the affliction of these terrible dreams / That shake us nightly.“ (Macbeth, Act 3, Scene 2, l.17–20). This depicts his hope in the third act.

His striving to reach peace, security and perfection of his state further urges him to a flight into more and more misdeeds. With his crimes, Macbeth hopes to gain protection from the chaos (Naumann, p.390, l.31-35; p.391, l.11-13). Thus misdeeds and the hope for security are mutually dependent.

In addition, he tries to anticipate the future with these two murders, so as not to leave anything to destiny. First in thoughts, then in actions – being the murders – he thus preempts the future since his hope here, as well as generally, consists of wishes and desires which he ties to the future, not to the present.

However, Fleance's escape in the murder scene makes the fulfillment of the prophecy addressed to Banquo – which Macbeth wants to prevent with all his power – probable again. Thus his hope of definitely securing himself – through the murder of both and, therewith, the refutation of the prophecy – is destroyed; all doubts and fears are back again.