ON THE KNOCKING AT THE GATE IN *MACBETH*

FROM my boyish day I had always felt a great perplexity on one point in *Macbeth*. It was this, the knocking at the gate, which succeeds to the murder of Duncan, produced to my feelings an effect for which I never could account. The effect was, that it reflected back upon the murderer a peculiar awfulness and depth of solemnity; yet, however obstinately I endeavored with my understanding to comprehend this, for many years I never could see why it should produce such an effect.

Here I pause for one moment, to exhort the reader never to pay any attention to his understanding, when it stands in opposition to any other faculty of his mind. The mere understanding, however useful and indispensable, is the meanest faculty in the human mind, and the most to be distrusted; and yet the great majority of people trust to do nothing else, which may do for ordinary life, but not for philosophical purposes. Of this out of ten thousand instances that I might produce, I will cite one. Ask of any person whatsoever, who is not previously prepared for the demand by a knowledge of the perspective, to draw in the rudest way the commonest appearance which depends upon the laws of that science; as, for instance, to represent the effect of two walls standing at right angles to each other, or the appearance of the houses on each side of a street, as seen by a person looking down the street from one extremity. Now in all cases, unless the person has happened to observe in pictures how it is that artists produce these effects, he will be utterly unable to make the smallest approximation to it. Yet why? For he has actually seen the effect every day of his life. The reason is—that he allows his understanding to overrule his eyes. His understanding, which includes no intuitive knowledge of the laws of vision, can furnish him with no reason why a line which is known and can be proved to be a horizontal line, should not *appear* a horizontal line; a line that made any angle with the perpendicular, less than a right angle, would seem to him to indicate that his houses were all tumbling down together. Accordingly, he makes the line of his house a horizontal line, and fails, of course, to produce the effect intended. Here, then, for instance out of many in which not only the understanding is allowed to overrule the eyes, but where the understanding is positively allowed to obliterate the eyes, as it were; for not only does the man believe the evidence of his understanding in opposition to that of his eyes, but (what is monstrous!) the idiot is not aware that his eyes ever gave such evidence. He does not know that he has seen (and therefore *quoad* his consciousness has *not* seen) that which he *has* seen every day of his life.

Put to return from this digression, my understanding could furnish no reason why the knocking at the gate in *Macbeth* should produce any effect, direct or reflected. In fact, my understanding said positively that it could *not* produce any effect. But I knew better; I felt that it did, and I waited and clung to the problem until further knowledge should enable me to solve it. At length, in 1812, Mr. Williams made his début on the stage of Ratcliffe Highway, and executed those unparalleled murders which have procured for him such a brilliant and undying reputation. On which murders, by the way, I must observe, that in one respect they have had an ill effect, by making the connoisseur in murder very fastidious in his taste, and dissatisfied by anything that has been since done in that line. All other murders look pale by the deep crimson of his; and, as an amateur once said to me in a querulous tone, 'There has been absolutely nothing *doing* since his time, or nothing that is worth speaking of. But this is wrong; for it is unreasonable to expect all men to be great artists, and born with the genius of Mr. Williams! Now it will be remembered, that in the first of these murders (that of the Marrs), the same incident (of a knocking at the door) soon after the work of extermination was complete) did actually occur, which the genius of Shakespeare has invented; and all good judges, and the most eminent dilettanti, acknowledged the felicity of Shakespeare's suggestion, as soon as it was actually realized. Here, then, was a fresh proof that I was right in relying on my own feeling, in opposition to my understanding; and I again set myself to study the problem so long and solved it to my own satisfaction, and my solution is this. Murder, in ordinary cases, where the sympathy is wholly directed to the case of the murdered person, is an incident of coarse and vulgar horror; and for this reason, that it flings the interest exclusively upon the natural but ignoble instinct by which we cleave to life; and instinct which, as being indispensable to the primal law of self-preservation, is the same in kind (though different in degree) amongst all living creatures; this instinct, therefore, because it annihilates all distinctions, and degrades the greatest of men to the level of 'the poor beetle that we tread on', exhibits human nature in its most abject and humiliating attitude. Such an attitude would little suit the purposes of the poet. What then must he do? He must throw the interest on the murderer. Our sympathy must be with *him* (of course I mean a sympathy of comprehension, a sympathy by which we enter into his feelings, and are made to understand them,—not a sympathy of pity or approbation). In the murdered person, all strife of thought, all flux and reflex of passion and of purpose, are crushed by one overwhelming panic; the fear of instant death smites him 'with its petrific mace'. But in the murderer, such a murderer as a poet will condescend to, there must be raging some great storm of passion—jealousy, ambition, vengeance, hatred—which will create a hell within him; and into this hell we are to look.

In *Macbeth*, for the sake of gratifying his own enormous and teeming faculty of creation, Shakespeare has introduced two murderers (and, as usual in his hands, they are remarkably discriminated—but, though in Macbeth the strife of mind is greater than in his wife, the tiger spirit has so awake, and his feelings caught chiefly by contagion from her,—yet, as both were finally involved in the guilt of murder, the murderous mind of necessity is finally to be presumed in both. This was to be expressed; and on its own account, as well as to make it a more proportionable antagonist to the unoffending nature of their victim, 'the gracious Duncan,' and adequately to expound 'the deep damnation of his taking off,' this was to be expressed with peculiar energy. We were to be made to feel that the human nature, i. e. the divine nature of love and mercy, spread through the hearts of all creatures, and seldom utterly withdrawn from man—was gone, vanished, extinct; and that the fiendish nature had taken its place. And, as this effect is marvellously accomplished in the *dialogues* and *soliloquies* themselves, so it is finally consummated by the expedient under consideration; and it is to this that I now solicit the reader's attention. If the reader has ever witnessed a wife, daughter, or sister in a fainting-fit, he had chance to have observed that the most affecting moment in such a spectacle is *that* in which a sigh and a stirring announce the recommencement of suspended life. Or, if the reader has ever been present in a vast metropolis on the day when some great national idol was carried in funeral pomp to his grave, and chancing to walk near the course through which it passed, has felt powerfully in the silence and desertion of the street to, and in the stagnation of ordinary business, the deep interest which at that moment was possessing the heart of man, if all at once he should hear the death-like stillness broken up by the sound of wheels grattling away from the scene, and making known that the transitory vision was dissolved, he will be aware that at no moment was his sense of the complete suspension and pause in ordinary human concerns so full and affecting, as at that moment when the suspension ceases, and the goings-on of human life are suddenly resumed. All action in any direction is best expounded, measured, and made apprehensible, by reaction. Now apply this to the case in *Macbeth*. Here, as I have said, the retiring of the human heart, and the entrance of the fiendish heart was to be expressed and made sensible. Another world has stepped in; and the murderers are taken out of the region of human things, human purposes, human desires. They are transfigured: Lady Macbeth is unsexed; Macbeth has forgot that he was born of woman; both are conformed to the image of devils; and the world of devils is suddenly revealed. But how shall this be conveyed and made palpable? In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear. The murderers, and the murder must be insulated—cut off by an immeasurable gulf from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs—locked up and sequestered in some deep recess; we must be made sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested—laid asleep—tranced—locked into a dread armistice; time must be annihilated; relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is, that when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced: the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them.

O mighty poet! Thy works are not as those of other men, simply and merely great works of art; but are also like the phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers; like frost and snow, rain knd dew, hail-storm and thunder, which are to be studied with entire submission of our own faculties, and in the perfect faith that in them there can be no too much or too little, nothing useless or inert—but that, the further we press in our discoveries, the more we shall see proofs of design and self-supporting arrangement where the careless eye had seen nothing but accident.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

(Born August 16, 1785; died December 8, 1859.)

It seems almost ludicrous to guard and explain my use of a word, in a situation where it would naturally explain itself. But it has become necessary to do so, in consequence of the unscholarlike use of the word sympathy, at present so general, by which, instead of taking it in its proper sense, as the act of reproducing in our minds the feelings of another, whether for hatred, indignation, love, pity, or approbation, it is made a mere synonym of the word *pity*, and hence, instead of saying 'sympathy *with* another', many writers adopt the monstrous barbarism of 'sympathy *for* another'.

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"She's the house guest of her mother." "That's a queer expression. She lives at home all the time." "Well, she sits around while her mother does the work."—*Louisville Courier-Journal.*

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MINIATURE ALMANAC

ATLANTIC STANDARD TIME

PHASES OF THE MOON

August	
Full Moon, 3rd	1h. 11m. a.m.
Last Quarter, 9th	3h. 56m. p.m.
New Moon, 17th	2h. 21m. p.m.
First Quarter, 25th	3h. 8m. p.m.

Day of Month	Day of Week	Sun Rises	Sun Sets	H. Water a.m.	H. Water p.m.	L. Water a.m.	L. Water p.m.
August							
11	Sat	5:29	7:37	6:33	7:02	0:27	12:50
12	Sun	5:31	7:36	7:40	8:04	1:33	1:59
13	Mon	5:32	7:34	8:44	9:00	2:37	2:58
14	Tue	5:33	7:32	9:39	9:50	3:38	3:59
15	Wed	5:35	7:31	10:25	10:35	4:34	4:50
16	Thur	5:36	7:29	11:06	11:15	5:20	5:34
17	Fri	5:37	7:27	11:43	11:53	5:57	6:12

The Tide Tables given above are for the Port of St. Andrews. For the following places the time of tides can be found by applying the correction indicated, which is to be subtracted in each case:

	H.W.	L.W.
Grand Harbor, G. M.,	18 min.	
Seal Cove,	30 min.	
Fish Head,	11 min.	
Welshpool, Campo.,	6 min.	8 min.
Eastport, Me.,	8 min.	10 min.
L'Etang Harbor,	7 min.	13 min.
Lepreau Bay,	9 min.	15 min.

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SHIPPING NEWS

PORT OF ST. ANDREWS

The publication of the usual shipping news in this column is suspended for the time being, in patriotic compliance with the request issued to all papers by the Admiralty.

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Tickets on Sale Every Wednesday until October 31st.

For full particulars, see Local Railway Agent, or write.

N. R. DesBrisay,
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Leaves Grand Manan Wednesdays at 7.00 a.m., for St. Stephen via Campobello, Eastport and St. Andrews.

Returning leaves St. Stephen Thursdays at 7.00 a.m., for Grand Manan via St. Andrews, Eastport and Campobello.

Leaves Grand Manan Fridays at 7.00 a.m., for St. John direct. Arrive at St. John 10.30 a.m.

Returning leaves St. John at 2.30 p.m. for Grand Manan direct. Arrive at Grand Manan 7.00 p.m., same day.

Leaves Grand Manan for St. Andrews Saturdays at 7.00 a.m., via Campobello and Eastport. Arrive at St. Andrews at 11.00 a.m.

Returning leaves St. Andrews at 1.30 p.m. same day, via Eastport and Campobello.

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METHODIST CHURCH—Rev. Thomas Hicks, Pastor. Services on Sunday at 11 a. m. and 7 p. m. Sunday School 12.00 m. Prayer service, Friday evening at 7.30.

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SHERIFF'S OFFICE, ST. ANDREWS, N. B.

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Time of Sittings of Courts in the County of Charlotte:—

CIRCUIT COURT: Tuesday, May 8, 1917, Chief Justice K. B. D. McKeown; Tuesday, October 2, 1917, Justice Chandler.

COUNTY COURT: First Tuesday in February and June, and the Fourth Tuesday in October in each year.
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