

Macbeth; Lines Pronounced Corrupt Restored,: Mutilations Before Unsuspected Amended, Also Some New Renderings

Matthias Mull



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All the corrections of erroneous passages that I have ventured to make, will be found set forth and treated in pp. xxxvii to lxix. Some of the difficulties have tested the skill of nearly all the past as well as present commentators; others which I point out are doubtless corruptions, that have hitherto passed without notice. They all possess considerable interest, specially the troublesome and awkward utterance of the Witch,

Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined,

which I alter thus,

And once the hedge-pig whined.

"Thrice" in this line is obviously a printer's repetition from the previous line, "Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed;" it is so obnoxious, that there should be no hesitation in obliterating it. I take it to be one of the many "meaningless misprints of the first Folio." The Clarendon editor of "K. Richard III." proposes a similar operation with the superfluous word "kindly" in II. ii. 24, "And hugg'd me in his arm, and kindly kiss'd my cheek." See the passage in "K. Henry V.," III. vi. 30, "Fortune is painted blind, with a muffler afore her eyes, to signify to you that Fortune is blind." The first "blind" is probably copied from the subsequent line; and the Cln. edr. says, "Warburton with great probability leaves out 'blind.' "

The interpretation of the "Apparitions," as universally accepted, I venture to think is profoundly erroneous. The instances are not a few in the plays of Shakespeare where speeches have been attributed to wrong characters, and in "Macbeth" there is an undoubted case, as I point out at p. lxxxi. In my "Supplementary Notes "to my edition of "Hamlet," I disclose a similar error, in the general misapprehension that certain instructions of Polonius to Beynaldo refer to Laertes, whereas it is another individual who is pointed to. So with the Apparitions, the true interpretation has not been apprehended. My treatment will be seen on p. xiii.

Among my "Explanations and Renderings" will be found treated the opening lines of the play, as uttered by the first Witch, lines that may not be thought to possess any interest or any latent significance—which have, in fact, always passed as idle or silly words, having only an air of perhaps trivial mystery. See p. li.

Banquo's surprising encounter with Macbeth in the dead of night, I have treated in a totally different aspect from other commentators, which I offer to the judgment of my readers. My reading of the episode is, that Macbeth was about at so unearthly a time with the design to despatch Banquo, presuming that he would then be asleep; and that the latter was overborne with the conviction that such a design was impending. I discard, too, the accepted notion that Banquo avows secret inclinations to anticipate Macbeth in his foul deed, and that he has any struggle whatever to overcome wicked thoughts....

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Michael Mitchell:

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