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MacBeth by William Shakespeare

Quotation

"She should have died hereafter:
There would have been a time for such
a word.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day
to day

To the last syllable of recorded time.
And all our yesterdays have lighted
fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out,
brief candle.

Life's but a walking shadow, a
poor player,

That struts and frets his hour
upon the stage,
And then is heard no more, It is
a tale,

Told by an idiot, full of sound
and fury, signifying nothing."

These words are uttered by Macbeth
after he hears of Lady Macbeth's death,
in Act 5, scene 5, lines 16-27. Given the
great love between them, his response
response is oddly muted, but it segues
quickly into a speech of such pessimism

→ P.T.O

and despair - one of the most famous speeches in all of Shakespeare - that the audience realizes how completely his wife's passing and the ruin of his power have undone Macbeth. His speech insists that there is no meaning or purpose in life. Rather, life "is a tale / Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, / Signifying nothing." One can easily understand how, with his wife dead and armies marching against him, Macbeth succumbs to such pessimism. Yet, there is also a defensive and self-justifying quality to his words. If everything is meaningless, then Macbeth's awful crimes are somehow made less awful, because, like everything else, they too "signify nothing".

Macbeth's statement that "Life's but a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage" can be read as Shakespeare's somewhat deflating reminder of the illusionary nature of the theater. After all, Macbeth is only a "player" himself, strutting on an Elizabethan stage. In any play, there is a conspiracy of

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sorts between the audience and the actors, as both pretend to accept the play's reality. Macbeth's comment calls attention to this conspiracy and partially explodes it — his ~~with~~ nihilism embraces not only his own life but the entire play. If we take his words to heart, the play, too, can be seen as an event
"full of sound and fury, / signifying nothing!"