

*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. —*

Macbeth (Act 5, Scene 5, lines 17-28)

"*Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow*" is the beginning of the second sentence of one of the most famous soliloquies in Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*. It takes place in the beginning of the **5th scene of Act 5**, during the time when the English troops, led by Malcolm and Macduff, are approaching Macbeth's castle to besiege it. Macbeth, the play's protagonist, is confident that he can withstand any siege from Malcolm's forces. He hears the cry of a woman and reflects that there was a time when his hair would have stood on end if he had heard such a cry, but he is now so full of horrors and slaughterous thoughts that it can no longer startle him.

Seyton then tells Macbeth of Lady Macbeth's death, and Macbeth delivers this soliloquy as his response to the news.^[1] Shortly afterwards he is told of the apparent movement of Birnam Wood towards Dunsinane Castle (as the witches previously prophesied to him), which is actually Malcolm's forces having disguised themselves with tree branches so as to disguise their numbers as they approach the castle. This sets the scene for the final events of the play and Macbeth's death at the hands of Macduff.

In Macbeth's final soliloquy the audience sees his final conclusion about life: it is devoid of any meaning, full of contrived (forzate) struggles. Days on this earth are short, a "brief candle" and an ignorant march towards a fruitless demise (decesso, scomparsa, rovina), "lighted fools. . . to dusty death." A person's life is so insubstantial that it is comparable to an actor who fills minor roles in an absurd play. There is a struggle for substance in life, the actor who "struts (avanzare in modo impettito) and frets (si agita) his hour" or a playwright who tells a "a tale full of sound and fury" but it is contrived and senseless and will thus fade into obscurity, a tale "Told by an Idiot. . . Signifying nothing" in which a "walking shadow" performs "And then is heard no more".

Macbeth's feelings towards Lady Macbeth in this soliloquy are not as clear as the main theme. There are many opinions regarding Macbeth's initial reaction when he hears that his wife is dead. Those who take the first line to mean "she would have died at sometime, either now or later" usually argue that it illustrates Macbeth's callous (spietato, insensibile) lack of concern for Lady Macbeth.

Macbeth said in Scene III of the same act that the battle would cheer him ever after or unseat him now. Up to that time he had expected to win the battle; he was ready to laugh the siege to scorn when interrupted by a woman's cry. His visionary thought may have pictured the victory as restoring him to the man he once was. He pauses on the word "hereafter" (from now on) - two feet are missing from the meter - and realises that the time will never come. Depressingly, he reflects that if it could have been, if he could have gone back, there would

have been time to consider that word, death, and mourn properly. Now, however, since there will be no victory nor going back, and she is gone, the tomorrows creep on (to have the sensation of something crawling (strisciare, gattonare) over the skin) with their insignificantly slow pace to the very end of all time.

Adapted from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tomorrow_and_tomorrow_and_tomorrow>