



Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

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Macbeth:

To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
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, 19–28

After hearing that his wife has died, Macbeth takes stock of his own indifference to the event. Death—our return to dust—seems to him merely the last act of a very bad play, an idiot's tale full of bombast and melodrama ("sound and fury"), but without meaning ("signifying nothing"). Murdering King Duncan and seizing his throne in retrospect seem like scenes of a script Macbeth was never suited to play. The idea that "all the world's a stage" is occasionally very depressing to Shakespeare's heroes.

"To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow"—along with the other phrases culled from this lode of Bardisms—conveys the mechanical beat of time as it carries this poor player-king from scene to scene. "The last syllable of recorded time"—what Macbeth earlier called "the crack of doom" [*see p. 25*—casts time as a sequence of words, as in a script; history becomes a dramatic record. If life is like a bad play, it is thus an illusion, a mere shadow cast by a "brief candle." The candle is perhaps the soul, and the prospects for Macbeth's are grim.

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