WHEN FAIR IS FOUL: PARADOX AND EQUIVOCATION IN MACBETH

Paradox: A statement that seems to be contradictory but that might be true when considered from a particular perspective.

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair.” –the Witches, 1.1.12

Equivocation: A statement that lends itself to multiple interpretations, often with the deliberate intent to deceive.

“Faith, here’s an equivocator that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God’s sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven.” –the Porter, 2.3.8-11

Paradoxes

A. Identify the speaker and the addressee, and explain as much as you can about the context of the situation.
B. Explain the specific terms in the quotation that make it a paradox.
C. Explain the hidden truth to be found in the paradox.

1. “So foul and fair a day I have not seen.” –1.3.39
2. “Lesser than Macbeth and greater.” –1.3.68
3. “Not so happy, yet much happier.” –1.3.69
4. “This supernatural soliciting / Cannot be ill, cannot be good.” –1.3.143-144
5. “And nothing is but what is not.” –1.3.155

Equivocations

A. Identify the speaker and the addressee, and explain as much as you can about the context of the situation.
B. Explain the specific terms in the quotation that make it an equivocation.
C. Explain the deceptive truth that is to be found in the equivocation.

6. “All our service, / In every point twice done and then done double ....” –1.6.18-19
7. “Had I but died an hour before this chance, / I had lived a blessed time ....” –2.3.107-108
8. “And though I could / With barefaced power sweep him from my sight / And bid my will avouch it, yet I must not, / For certain friends that are both his and mine, / Whose loves I may not drop, but wail his fall / Who I myself struck down.” –3.1.134-139
9. “Thou canst not say I did it ....” –3.4.61