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MACBETH

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Macbeth

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Introduction

About the Play

Royal entertainment

When Elizabeth I of England was dying, childless, she named James VI of Scotland as her successor. He became James I of England.

In August 1606 James was at Hampton Court, a palace near London, entertaining his brother-in-law, King Christian of Denmark. A play was acted for them, *Macbeth* – written by the best dramatist of the time, William Shakespeare. It was a new play, but the story was an old one, and James knew it well. It was about his ancestors, Banquo and Fleance, through whom he had inherited the throne of Scotland.

Shakespeare found the story in *The Chronicles of Scotland*, by Raphael Holinshed. However, his play is much more than a dramatic re-writing of the historical facts. He made many changes, and the biggest of these concerned James's ancestor. In the *true* story, Banquo joined Macbeth in killing Duncan; but clearly it would be tactless to suggest that James was descended from a regicide – the murderer of a king. So Shakespeare's

Banquo is innocent.

James also believed that he was descended spiritually from the long tradition of English monarchs, and that he had inherited the power of healing that Edward the Confessor (1042 – 66) possessed. Shakespeare's description of this power (Act IV, Scene iii, lines 148 – 58) is, to some extent, deliberate flattery of his king. Shakespeare also knew that James was extremely interested in witchcraft and had written a book about it.

Macbeth is certainly a play 'fit for a king'. On one level it is royal entertainment – and entertainment, too, for all those of us who enjoy the suspense and excitement of a murder story.

A moral lesson

But of course it is more than this – more than flattery for an ancient British monarch. Although the story is largely true, we do not read *Macbeth* as 'history'. We could interpret Shakespeare's play as a moral lesson. Macbeth murders his king. To murder any man is a crime, but those who lived at the time of Shakespeare thought that the murder of a king was the greatest of all crimes. Kings were appointed by God, to rule as His deputies: rebellion against a true king was rebellion against God. By murdering Duncan, Macbeth gains the crown; but he loses love, friendship, respect – and, in the end, his life. His crime is rightly punished.

Macbeth teaches us, in a new way, the old lesson that crime does not pay. But there are at least two more levels.

About ambition

As we look at the character of Macbeth we see, more clearly than we are able to see in real life, the effects of uncontrolled ambition on a man. Macbeth is, except for his ambition, noble in nature. He has full knowledge of right and wrong; he knows that he has committed a very great crime by murdering Duncan. Shakespeare shows us how Macbeth gradually becomes hardened to his crimes, and yet how he suffers from fears which he has brought on himself.

Poetry and imagination

On another level, the play has great power as a work of poetry and imagination. The language is rich in sound and meaning, full of pictures, and immensely varied. For example, when Macbeth comes from the murder of Duncan, his hands are covered in the king's blood. He looks at them, and feels that all the waters in the ocean cannot wash away the blood, but that

> this my hand will rather
> The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
> Making the green one red.
>
> (Act II, Scene ii, lines 64 – 6)

The word 'multitudinous' gives a sense of vastness, and 'incarnadine' (meaning 'redden') is another impressive word; its length and sound give strength to the meaning. These two words are more Latin than English, and were very new to the English language; Shakespeare was one of the first writers to use them. They are followed by the simplest, most direct words. Imagine a film camera. First the camera shows you a picture of endless waters, stretching as far as the eye can see. Then there is a sudden close-up picture, perhaps a small pool of green water that turns red with blood as we look at it. Such skill in the use of language is unique.

* * *

Although I have distinguished four levels on which the play *Macbeth* can work, I do not want to give the impression that these levels can in fact be separated from each other. The entertainment, the moral teaching, the psychology of ambition, and the poetry are often all contained in the same speech – even, sometimes, in the same line. *Macbeth* demands an alert reader.

No summary can do justice to the play. At best, a commentary such as this can be no more than a map. It can show the roads, and even point out the important places; but it is no substitute for reading the play.

Leading Characters in the Play

Duncan

The King of Scotland (*c*. 1034). He is presented as a true and gracious monarch – the embodiment of the Elizabethan belief that a king was appointed as God's deputy on earth and was himself almost divine.

Malcolm

Duncan's elder son. Early in the play Malcolm is named as Duncan's heir, the next king of Scotland – and consequently he becomes the prime suspect when Duncan is murdered.

Macbeth

A mighty and ambitious warrior, one of the leaders of Duncan's army. A witches' prophecy leads him to murder Duncan so that he himself can be king – but his conscience afterwards will never let him rest.

Lady Macbeth

Macbeth's wife. She is even more ambitious than her husband, and has fewer moral scruples. She urges Macbeth to kill Duncan, and refuses to understand his doubts and hesitations. Gradually her close relationship with Macbeth crumbles into nothing.

Banquo

Macbeth's co-commander in Duncan's army. He also hears the witches' prophecies, but resists their temptation.

Macduff

A Scottish thane (nobleman) who comes to prominence after the murder of Duncan and leads the opposition to Macbeth.

Ross

A Scottish thane. He is a valuable commentator on the action of the play

and its effects in the wider world outside Macbeth's castle.

The Witches

Three witches, or supernatural phenomena. Called the 'weird sisters' in Shakespeare's historical source-book, they are related to the three Fates in classical mythology. Productions have represented them very differently: as grotesque and frightening; comic and ridiculous; young and beautiful; or masked and hideous.

Synopsis

Act 1

Scene 1

A Prologue of evil: the witches plan to meet with Macbeth.

Scene 2

King Duncan is told of the success of the battle and of the bravery shown by Banquo and Macbeth. He decides to reward Macbeth with the title 'Thane of Cawdor'.

Scene 3

The witches speak strange prophecies to Macbeth and Banquo – and Ross brings the new title to Macbeth.

Scene 4

Duncan announces that his son, Malcolm, will be the next king of Scotland – and Macbeth begins to worry.

Scene 5

Lady Macbeth reads her husband's letter telling what has happened; she welcomes him home, and then prepares to receive the king.

Scene 6

King Duncan and his followers approach Macbeth's castle and are welcomed by Lady Macbeth.

Scene 7

Macbeth leaves the state dinner, suddenly worried by what he is planning to do – to murder Duncan. But Lady Macbeth stirs up his spirits again.

Act 2

Scene 1

Banquo and his son, Fleance, are going to bed when they encounter Macbeth, who is preparing himself for his grim task.

Scene 2

Macbeth has murdered Duncan. Lady Macbeth takes the bloody daggers away from her husband, who is already beginning to regret what he has done.

Scene 3

All is discovered. The Porter is roused from his drunken sleep by Macduff and Lennox who go to call upon the king but find he has been murdered. Macbeth panics and kills Duncan's attendants. Duncan's sons are afraid for their own safety and slip away secretly.

Scene 4

Ross and an Old Man discuss the unnatural events that occurred on the night of Duncan's murder. They learn from Macduff that the king's two sons have fled, and that Macbeth has been chosen to be the next king.

Act 3

Scene 1

Banquo is suspicious – and Macbeth arranges to have him and his son, Fleance, murdered by two hired assassins.

Scene 2

Lady Macbeth is uneasy. Macbeth assures her that everything is under control, but he refuses to tell her what he is planning.

Scene 3

Banquo is murdered – but Fleance escapes.

Scene 4

Macbeth and his wife welcome guests to another state banquet. The Ghost of Banquo appears but only Macbeth can see it, and his strange behaviour startles Lady Macbeth and their guests.

Scene 5

The witches and their queen, Hecate, prepare the audience for the next meeting with Macbeth.

Scene 6

Lennox and an unnamed Lord discuss the state of affairs: Malcolm is in England, Macduff has gone to join him, and the English king is raising an army to fight against Macbeth.

Act 4

Scene 1

The witches assemble to meet Macbeth, and promise to answer his questions. Their magic Apparitions comfort him at first – and then give cause for alarm.

Scene 2

Lady Macduff questions Ross about her husband's flight, and then tries to explain the situation to her little son. A Messenger warns her to flee from the palace, but it is too late and the murderers rush into the room.

Scene 3

Macduff has joined Malcolm at the court of Edward the Confessor (King of England), and the two men, at first suspicious of each other, test their loyalties. Plans are in hand for an invasion of Scotland by the English king – then Macduff hears of the murder of his wife and children.

Act 5

Scene 1

Lady Macbeth suffers from a guilty conscience. She walks in her sleep, and dreams that she and her husband are murdering King Duncan.

Scene 2

A section of the invading army marches towards Dunsinane, and their leaders discuss the enemy, Macbeth, who is showing signs of panic.

Scene 3

When he is told of the approaching armies, Macbeth tries to comfort himself by recalling the witches' prophecies. He discusses his wife's condition with the Doctor, then goes off into battle.

Scene 4

Malcolm's soldiers camouflage themselves with branches from the trees of Birnam Wood to mask their approach.

Scene 5

The battle is at its height when Seyton brings news to Macbeth that his wife has just died. A Messenger tells Macbeth that Birnam Wood is moving towards Dunsinane.

Scene 6

Malcolm's army reaches Macbeth's castle: the battle starts.

Scene 7

Macbeth encounters Young Siward and kills him. Macduff comes in search of Macbeth, they fight, and Macbeth is killed. Malcolm is proclaimed King.

Macbeth: Commentary

Act 1

Scene 1 and Scene 2

A very short scene opens the play. It is long enough to awaken curiosity, but not to satisfy it. We have come in at the *end* of the witches' meeting, just as they are arranging their next appointment before their 'familiar spirits' – devils in animal shapes – call them away into the 'fog and filthy air'. The mood of the play is set here, although the action does not start until the next scene. Here we learn about the tough battle that has been raging, about the rebels who seem to have all the luck, and about two brave men, Macbeth and Banquo, who win the victory for Scotland. King Duncan rewards Macbeth for his courage by giving him the title 'Thane of Cawdor'; but we ought to remember that the title first belonged to one who was 'a most disloyal traitor'.

Scene 3

The witches' malice and magic are shown, as they await Macbeth on the lonely moor (a wasteland area). They have power over the winds, and can make life miserable for such men as the captain of the ship, 'The Tiger'. Their dance, when they hear Macbeth's drum, is made up of steps in groups of three – a magical number. Macbeth and Banquo, however, are ordinary human beings, tired after the day's fighting and grumbling about the weather. Banquo is almost amused by the witches; he cannot bring himself to think of them as women because 'your beards forbid me to interpret | That you are so'. Macbeth is stunned to silence by their prophecies, but Banquo questions them calmly.

‘Fair is foul, and foul is fair’, (I, i, 12). Aicha Kossoko, Amanda Harris, and Joyce Henderson as the three Witches, Battersea Arts Centre, 2000.

The audience can judge the witches better than Macbeth can. *We* know, from the previous scene, that his courage, and not the witches’ magic, has won him the title ‘Thane of Cawdor’; and we are not surprised, as he is, when Ross greets him with this title. While Ross, Angus, and Banquo speak together (perhaps at the back of the stage), Macbeth speaks his own thoughts aloud in a soliloquy – a speech not intended by the speaker to be overheard by the other characters. They are frightening thoughts: they frighten Macbeth as well as us, because murder is in his mind. He tries to reject this, declaring that he will leave everything to chance:

> If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me
> Without my stir.

Scene 4

When Duncan hears of the death of the treacherous Thane of Cawdor, he utters a very meaningful remark:

> There’s no art
> To find the mind’s construction in the face.
> He was a gentleman on whom I built
> An absolute trust.

We have not seen the traitor, so we do not know how appropriate these words are for *him*. But we have seen his successor as Thane, and Macbeth is certainly a gentleman on whom Duncan is building 'An absolute trust'. Duncan's comment could also be applied to other characters and events in this play, where things are not what they seem to be, where 'Fair is foul and foul is fair'.

At this point Duncan makes a very important announcement:

> We will establish our estate upon
> Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
> The Prince of Cumberland.

In the time of Duncan, the crown of Scotland was not passed automatically from father to son. Instead, the king could name his successor, as Duncan does here, and grant him the title 'Prince of Cumberland'. If the king were to die without naming an heir, or if the heir was not acceptable, the Scottish nobles could elect a new king. We hear that Macbeth is elected in this way in Act II, Scene iv. Duncan's choice of Malcolm comes as a great shock to Macbeth, for he realizes it is an obstacle between him and the crown. At the end of the scene, he admits to possessing 'black and deep desires', but he is afraid to speak these openly, even to himself.

Scene 5

We already know the contents of Macbeth's letter to his wife, but the letter is important because it shows us something of the relationship between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. He has no secrets from her, and she is his 'dearest partner of greatness'. Lady Macbeth understands her husband well. She knows that he has great ambitions, but she also knows that he is honourable, and that this sense of honour will not allow him to 'catch the nearest way' – murder. She knows that she will have to urge her husband on to become king, and she calls for evil spirits to help her. She is prepared to give up all the gentle, tender qualities of a woman, so that she can become a sexless, pitiless fiend. She takes full control over the situation, and Macbeth seems glad to let her have the responsibility.

Scene 6

Duncan and his followers appreciate the peaceful harmony of Macbeth's castle, where Lady Macbeth welcomes the guests with an overflow of polite compliments, – which even the audience can barely understand.

Scene 7

Alone after dinner, Macbeth has an opportunity to think about murdering his king, perhaps for the first time. At first murder had been only a dream, 'but fantastical' (Act I, Scene iii, line 138), but now it is a real moral problem. He knows that the crime must be punished; divine justice in a 'life to come' does not worry him so much as judgement in this earthly life. Then he considers the duties he owes to Duncan – the duties of a kinsman, of a subject to his king, and of a host to his guest. Finally, he thinks of the character of Duncan, a king of almost divine excellence.

Macbeth has a vision of the heavenly powers in a state of horror at such a murder; he sees Pity personified as a 'naked new-born babe' which is nevertheless 'Striding the blast', while 'heaven's cherubin' are mounted on the winds. The speech builds to a mighty climax then, suddenly, the power is lost when Macbeth turns to his own wretched motive for committing such a crime. He can find nothing except 'Vaulting ambition', and even now he realizes that too high a leap ('vault') can only lead to a fall.

His mind is made up, and he tells his wife 'We will proceed no further in this business'. However, he is not prepared for her rage and abuse. She calls him a coward, insults his manliness, and declares that she would have murdered her child while it was feeding at her breast, rather than break such a promise as Macbeth has done. Defeated by his wife's scorn, and persuaded by her encouragement, Macbeth agrees to murder his king.

Act 2

Scene 1

The witches have disturbed Banquo, as well as Macbeth. As he crosses the courtyard of Macbeth's castle, Banquo hears a noise, and calls for his sword. This suggests tension, as he should not need a sword in a friend's home. Macbeth also shows signs of stress – he speaks only a few words in his replies to Banquo, and when he is alone, the strain shows very clearly.

He is living in a nightmare, but although he is at first alarmed by the dagger that his imagination creates, he seems later to *enjoy* the horror of the moment. The last lines of the scene could even show a grim humour:

> the bell invites me.
> Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell
> That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

Scene 2

Lady Macbeth is as tense as her husband, and she has been drinking to give herself courage. Her speech is jerky – she reacts to every sound, and when her husband comes from the king's room, his hands red with Duncan's blood, she greets him with relief and pride: 'My husband'. He has now proved himself, in her eyes, to be a man.

Macbeth, however, slowly awakens from the nightmare he has been living in and realizes what a terrible crime he has committed. He speaks of the real sounds he has heard, and then of the voice that cried:

> 'Sleep no more:
> Macbeth does murder sleep'

This sleep ban will be carried out: never again will Macbeth, or his wife, have any rest, and from time to time throughout the play they will comment on their weariness and lack of refreshing sleep.

For the moment, however, Lady Macbeth again takes charge of the situation. Early in this scene, she revealed some natural, womanly feelings when she confessed that she could not murder Duncan herself because he 'resembled | My father as he slept'. But now she speaks a line which shows, terrifyingly, how little she thinks of the guilt that she shares with her husband:

> A little water clears us of this deed.

Scene 3

The mood of the play suddenly changes. The audience has been as tense as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in the last scene, and we need to relax a little

now. The Porter, woken from a drunken sleep, gives us something to laugh at. His jokes are not so funny today as they were in 1606. In Shakespeare's day, his chatter about the 'equivocator' might have reminded the audience of the recent and famous trial of a priest who could 'swear in both the scales against either scale'. Nevertheless, the wise observations on drink and lechery are still amusing for a modern audience.

When Macduff and Lennox arrive, they come almost from another world; or perhaps the Porter is more accurate than he could ever imagine when he pretends to be porter at the gate of hell. The tension mounts again as we wait for the murder to be discovered.

Lennox's description of the 'unruly' night would have been full of significance to the Elizabethans. They firmly believed that any disorder amongst humans was reflected by disorder in nature. Macbeth is cautious; nevertheless his reply to Lennox – ''twas a rough night' – seems an understatement.

The moment we have been waiting for arrives. Macduff's words emphasize the fact that this is more than an ordinary murder:

> Confusion now hath made his masterpiece:
> Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
> The Lord's anointed temple.

The scene is chaotic: alarm-bells ring, and characters appear from all sides of the stage. Macduff is almost hysterical; the king's sons are afraid; Macbeth impulsively kills Duncan's servants – and by doing so arouses Macduff's suspicion. The speech in which Macbeth attempts to justify himself may perhaps convince the other thanes, but we know how false it is, and the elaborate images ('His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood') stress this falsehood. Lady Macbeth knows the truth too: she faints (or pretends to faint) and some attention is drawn away from her husband.

Scene 4

The short scene between Ross and the Old Man serves three purposes. At first, it continues the comparison begun in Lennox's lines in Scene iii between the human world and the natural world, mentioning strange events and stressing that they are

unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done.

The second function of the scene appears when Macduff enters to bring more news: it indicates the passing of time. Thirdly, it brings Macduff into greater prominence, because it allows the actor to reveal, by the tone of his voice, that Macduff continues to be suspicious of Macbeth, and that he does not believe the answers Macbeth gives to Ross's questions.

Act 3

Scene 1

Banquo also is suspicious of Macbeth:

Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weïrd women promis'd, and I fear
Thou played'st most foully for't

Scene 2

But he thinks about the prophecy concerning his own children, and this gives him hope. Macbeth too has been thinking about this prophecy, and it gives him cause for bitterness: he realizes that his crown is 'fruitless', and his sceptre 'barren'. He murdered Duncan in order to make the witches' prophecy come true, and now he plots to murder Banquo and Fleance so that the witches' promise to Banquo may *not* come true.

Lady Macbeth now begins to show signs of strain, and we hear that Macbeth suffers 'terrible dreams'. For a moment, Macbeth and his wife show understanding and sympathy for each other, but the moment does not last long. Macbeth keeps the plot to murder Banquo secret from his wife. He alarms her by conjuring up an atmosphere of evil, and once again he appears to enjoy his dreadful imaginings (just as he did when he went to murder Duncan). But it is a mistake to hide the facts from Lady Macbeth: this is the beginning of the break in their relationship.

When Macbeth calls upon 'seeling night' to hide his wickedness, we are

reminded how Lady Macbeth, before the murder of Duncan, had called for the night, shrouded in 'the dunnest smoke of hell' (I, V, 50), to hide the murdering dagger from the sight of heaven.

Scene 3

Outside the castle, the two murderers wait for Banquo and Fleance. It is a surprise, to us as well as to them, when a third hired assassin appears. Macbeth can trust no one, not even the thugs he first hired to murder Banquo.

Scene 4

The confusion of Banquo's murder contrasts well with the ceremony of the state banquet. The formality is announced in the first line: 'You know your own degrees; sit down'; and the scene proceeds with dignity for some time. However, the appearance of one of Banquo's murderers disturbs the peace for Macbeth. The state occasion demands courteous behaviour from the king, but when the murderer says that Fleance has escaped, Macbeth becomes agitated. Banquo's Ghost, which only Macbeth can see, adds to this distress, until the whole scene breaks into fragments, and Lady Macbeth has to ask her guests to leave, without any of the formality with which they arrived:

> Stand not upon the order of your going,
> But go at once.

The banquet is symbolic as well as realistic, and Shakespeare is careful that we do not overlook this aspect. As soon as the guests are seated, Macbeth promises to 'drink a measure | The table round'. In many societies and religions, the sharing of a cup of wine, sometimes even called a 'loving-cup', symbolizes unity and fellowship and this it is how it is intended here. When Macbeth steps away from the table to speak to the murderer, Lady Macbeth calls him back. She reminds him of his duty as a host, adding that on such an occasion 'the sauce to meat is ceremony'. By murdering Duncan, Macbeth brings chaos to Scotland, breaking up the harmony of a well-ordered country, just as he breaks up the state banquet 'With most

admir'd disorder'.

Scene 5

The witches and their queen, Hecate, prepare for another meeting with Macbeth. There is evidence to suggest that Shakespeare did not write this scene, and some people believe it was inserted by an over-enthusiastic actor, who saw that the audiences enjoyed the witches' scenes, and decided to give them another!

Scene 6

Suspicion of Macbeth is growing. Lennox speaks here not as himself, an individual character, but with what we now call 'the voice of the people'. His words are innocent in meaning, but the exaggeration of tone directs the actor to make his speech heavily sarcastic – for example:

> How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight
> In pious rage the two delinquents tear,
> That were the slaves of drink and thralls of sleep?

The unnamed Lord gives us information, in this scene, about Malcolm, and also makes the first reference in the play to the king of England, 'the most pious Edward', who is the complete opposite of Macbeth. This comparison will be developed in a later scene.

Act 4

Scene 1

We now see Macbeth receiving comfort from the three Apparitions that the witches call up. They appear in symbolic form. The first, 'an armed head', represents Macbeth's own head (wearing a helmet); the 'bloody child' that comes next is Macduff, who had been 'untimely ripp'd' from his mother's womb (as he tells Macbeth in Act v, Scene vii); and the last, the royal child with a tree in his hand, is Malcolm, the rightful king of Scotland, who approaches the palace at Dunsinane camouflaged with tree-branches (Act v, Scene iv). Macbeth cannot interpret these symbols, but Shakespeare expects

the audience to understand what is meant. This is ‘dramatic irony’ – when the truth of a situation is known to the audience but hidden from the characters in the play. There is dramatic irony, too, in the words spoken by the Apparitions, for again *we* understand the real meanings, while Macbeth can only understand the apparent meanings of the words. Macbeth, however, is in no doubt about the significance of the final ‘show of Eight Kings’.

Scene 2 and Scene 3

This pathetic scene in which Lady Macduff and her son are massacred shows us Macbeth’s cruelty in action. When he plotted to kill Banquo’s son, Fleance, he could justify the crime to himself by referring to the prophecy that Banquo’s children should be kings. But he is in no danger from Lady Macduff or from her son, and the crime is more dreadful because it is motiveless. Our knowledge of the crime helps us to find more dramatic irony in the scene that follows, when Malcolm mistrusts Macduff chiefly because he cannot understand

> Why in that rawness left you wife and child,
> Those precious motives, those strong knots of love,
> Without leave-taking?

Macduff must prove his loyalty to Malcolm and to Scotland; then Malcolm

must prove that he is worthy to be king. Again we are told about Edward the Confessor, and this time we hear about his divine gift of healing. This characteristic was not chosen by chance. Shakespeare uses many images of sickness – just a little later in this scene, he describes Scotland as a place where

> good men's lives
> Expire before the flowers in their caps,
> Dying or ere they sicken.

In Act v, Scene ii Caithness recognizes Malcolm as the doctor who can cure Scotland's sickness, calling him 'the med'cine of the sickly weal' (line 27).

We respond intellectually to this account of the English king, and to the idea of the monarch as some kind of physician, appointed by God to safeguard the country's health. We respond emotionally to the next episode in this long scene where Ross breaks the bad news to Macduff. We feel the painful irony of Ross's evasive answer: 'they were well at peace when I did leave 'em'. If we had not seen Lady Macduff and her son, we should not be distressed; because of Scene ii, however, we are able to share Macduff's own grief. I am always moved by Macduff's answer to Malcolm, who urges him to

> Dispute it like a man.

Macduff replies with dignity

> I shall do so;
> But I must also feel it as a man.

The word 'man' is being used in two senses. Malcolm intends it to mean 'bravely', but Macduff is thinking of a man as a human being, with tender emotions of love and grief, which must not be denied.

Act 5

Scene 1

The very next scene shows what happens when human emotions are denied. At the beginning of the play, Lady Macbeth prayed that she should know 'no compunctious visitings of nature' (I, v, 44) that might prevent her from murdering Duncan. Now she walks in her sleep, and her mind constantly re-lives the night of the murder. On that night, she declared confidently that 'A little water clears us of this deed' (II, ii, 70), but now she knows that 'all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand'. It is the last time we see Lady Macbeth. Although the Doctor warns her lady-in-waiting to 'Remove from her the means of all annoyance', we learn later that, 'by self and violent hands', she kills herself (V, ix, 37).

Scene 2

From now until the end of the play the action moves between the two armies: Malcolm's soldiers, steadily drawing closer to Dunsinane, and Macbeth's forces, besieged near the castle. Caithness and Angus discuss the strength of the enemy, and Angus offers a shrewd comment on Macbeth:

> Now does he feel his title
> Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
> Upon a dwarfish thief.

This is not the first image of badly-fitting clothes. When Macbeth is given the title 'Thane of Cawdor', soon after the witches' prophesy that it will be given to him, he stands apart from Banquo and the king's messengers. Then Banquo laughs, and explains that Macbeth is like a man with new clothes:

> New honours come upon him
> Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould,
> But with the aid of use.
>
> (I, iii, 143–5)

Macbeth himself thinks of the praises he has earned for his courage in terms of fine clothes,

> Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
> Not cast aside so soon.

(I, vii, 34–5)

There are many allusions like this throughout the play. They make us stop and think about the relationship between Macbeth and the honours he is 'wearing'. Has he won them, or stolen them? Will his 'clothes' fit, in time – or will they always be too big for him?

Scene 3

When he has heard the Doctor's medical opinion of his wife, Macbeth asks, with his grim humour, for a medical opinion on the state of the country. The Doctor is allowed the same humour when he closes the scene:

> Were I from Dunsinane away and clear,
> Profit again should hardly draw me here.

The situation is now so serious that only a sour joke (playing on the generally accepted belief that doctors are greedy for gold) can ease the tension.

Scene 4 and Scene 5

Birnam Wood begins to move and what seemed like witches' magic is seen to be elementary military tactics. Excitement and tension mount, as the soldiers come closer to Dunsinane. But Macbeth does not respond to the excitement: he has lost the capacity for feeling either fear or, as we see when he hears of his wife's death, grief. He speaks the most disillusioned words that Shakespeare ever wrote when he contemplates life and its 'petty pace from day to day'. He still hopes that the witches' promises (made to him in Act IV, Scene i) will protect him; but when he hears that 'The wood began to move' his confidence is shaken, and he begins

> To doubt the equivocation of the fiend
> That lies like truth.

At this point we should remember the 'equivocator' that the Porter joked about, long ago, in Act II, Scene iii, and appreciate the way that this whole

play insists on the difference between *being* and *seeming*, or between saying one thing and meaning another.

Scene 6 to Scene 9

Continuous battle is now being waged, and the stage should never be empty. Macbeth is at last forced to confront Macduff, and also to face the truth and admit that ‘these juggling fiends’ cannot be trusted. When the castle has been surrendered, Macbeth defeated, and victory proclaimed, Malcolm announces the beginning of a new reign. Order has now been returned to Scotland, and business will once again be conducted ‘in measure, time, and place’.

Macbeth: the Man

Who can tell us more about a man's character than his wife? Shakespeare allows Lady Macbeth to explain her husband's character as she understands it, and although she cannot see the *whole* truth, she tells us a great deal about Macbeth that *is* true. Two lines of her soliloquy in Act I, Scene v are particularly significant:

> Thou wouldst be great,
> Art not without ambition, but without
> The illness should attend it.
>
> (I, v, 17–19)

By 'illness' Lady Macbeth means 'evil', but her metaphor is appropriate: Macbeth 'catches' evil, as one might catch a disease. The play shows how his symptoms develop, until there is no hope of a cure, and the man must die.

Macbeth the noble warrior

We hear a lot about Macbeth before he comes on to the stage, first from the Sergeant who has fought on his side, and then from Ross, who also speaks about Macbeth's courage in battle. These descriptions lead us to expect a noble warrior and a loyal subject to Duncan. We have only one slight doubt about Macbeth, and we are not able to explain quite what this is. We know that, somehow, he is associated with the witches; and this, surely, cannot be good.

Macbeth's ambition

Macbeth speaks very little when first the witches, and then Ross, hail him as 'Thane of Cawdor'. Perhaps he is stunned to silence by his good fortune. But soon we hear him speak – or rather, think aloud, for he does not mean to be overheard:

> Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor:
> The greatest is behind.
>
> (I, iii, 115–16)

Very soon he begins to admit to a 'suggestion', some 'horrible imaginings', and then he says the word 'murder' to himself (I, iii, 133–137; 138). Once this word has been spoken, we must regard Macbeth with suspicion, and the suspicion grows when he confesses his 'black and deep desires' in the scene that follows (I, iv, 51). Our suspicions are confirmed when his wife,

speaking as though he were in the room with her, tells Macbeth that she knows he wants

> that which rather thou dost fear to do,
> Than wishest should be undone.
>
> (I, v, 23–4)

It is not, however, cowardice that restrains Macbeth. At the end of Act I he is wrestling with his conscience. He is deeply aware of the duty which he owes to Duncan:

> He's here in double trust:
> First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
> Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
> Who should against his murderer shut the door,
> Not bear the knife myself.
>
> (I, vii, 12–16)

These are profound reasons for curbing his ambition, but Macbeth continues the soliloquy. Even if he were not – as kinsman, subject, and host – in duty bound to *defend* Duncan, rather than harm him, there would still be enormous sin in killing the king. Macbeth appreciates Duncan's fine qualities – his humility and his integrity in carrying out to perfection the tasks of kingship. Macbeth knows that to destroy such virtue would be a crime against heaven. He can appreciate Duncan's good qualities and this is a virtue in Macbeth.

Before Lady Macbeth comes on to the scene, Macbeth has won a great victory over himself, and he is almost triumphant when he tells her, 'We will proceed no further in this business' (I, vii, 31).

Macbeth and murder

But Lady Macbeth, unlike her husband, has no such conscience. At this moment, she is the stronger of the two, and Macbeth cannot stand up to her accusations that he is a coward, lacking in manliness, and a traitor to his word. He gives in to her and, in order to prove himself a man in her eyes, he allows her to guide him.

After the murder of Duncan, Macbeth is horrified to think of what he has done. Again Shakespeare contrasts Macbeth and his wife in their attitudes to murder. Lady Macbeth is bold and confident, because she does not understand that the deed is morally wrong; her only concern is to destroy the evidence. Macbeth, however, awakens to a consciousness of guilt that will remain with him until his death.

Macbeth now has to act many parts. When the body of Duncan is discovered, he must appear as the loyal subject, appalled by the murder of his king. In speaking to the two Murderers whom he has hired to kill Banquo, he tries to show that he is a worthy ruler, distressed by injuries which have been inflicted on his subjects. And at the state banquet, probably his first public appearance since he was made king, he plays the part of host and friend to his thanes. He is not wholly successful in any of

these roles. When the murder is discovered, he over-acts to such an extent that his wife tries to draw attention away from him by fainting. The Murderers are not interested in his efforts to justify the murder of Banquo: they have been hired to kill a man, and they will do the job they are paid to do. And the banquet is ruined for Macbeth by the appearance of Banquo's Ghost.

Macbeth appears again as himself (that is, not playing any 'part') at the end of Act III, Scene iv, when he and his wife face each other across the remains of their banquet. He now knows that 'blood will have blood' (III, iv, 122), and that the first murder is *only* the first. A new character is emerging – a man who is so desperate that he must act and not stop to consider the reasons for acting:

> Strange things I have in head that will to hand,
> Which must be acted ere they may be scann'd.
>
> (*3*, 4, 139–40)

The last line here refers to an actor's part in a play, which ought to be 'scann'd' – learned – before it is performed. With this comparison, Macbeth is beginning to recognize an element of unreality about his life.

Macbeth the cruel tyrant

The new Macbeth confronts the witches and demands to be answered. The answers give him a feeling of confidence which we, the audience, know to be unfounded. But Macbeth trusts no one. He has no faith in the loyalty of the thanes, and sets spies on each one of them (see iii, iv, 131–2). Now it seems that he will not trust even the witches and their 'masters', as he is determined to 'make assurance double sure' (IV, i, 82) by slaughtering Macduff's entire family.

We do not see Macbeth for some time after his appearance in this scene with the witches. We hear a lot about him, though – and everything that we hear tells us that Macbeth has become a cruel tyrant, and that he has changed Scotland into a country 'Almost afraid to know itself' (IV, iii, 167). There are more rumours to be heard when Malcolm's army moves towards Dunsinane, and we learn that opinions about Macbeth vary – but only slightly:

Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him
Do call it valiant fury.

(v, ii, 13–14)

He is indeed madly self-confident, believing that he is invincible:

Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane,
I cannot taint with fear. What's the boy Malcolm?
Was he not born of woman?

(v, iii, 2–4)

Macbeth the defeated

Alone, however, Macbeth is neither mad nor furious. He feels old and lonely:

My way of life
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have.

(v, iii, 22–6)

Seyton tells him that his wife is dead, but he cannot grieve for her. Life has no meaning for him, and once again he sees himself as an actor,

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more.

(v, v, 24–5)

He has lost everything, and when he hears of the 'moving grove' (v, v, 37) he knows that he is defeated.

Macbeth the dead butcher

Macbeth chooses to die in battle, 'with harness on our back' (v, v, 51), and the decision perhaps revives a spark of our former respect for the mighty warrior. At last he is challenged by Macduff, and he is reluctant to fight:

> Of all men else I have avoided thee,
> But get thee back, my soul is too much charg'd
> With blood of thine already.
>
> (v, viii, 4–6)

How should we interpret this? The first of the Apparitions told Macbeth to 'Beware Macduff' – is this why he has avoided him? Or is it guilt that has kept Macbeth from coming face-to-face with the man whose wife and children he has so brutally murdered? Is conscience returning along with courage?

Shakespeare's Verse

Easily the best way to understand and appreciate Shakespeare's verse is to read it aloud – and don't worry if you don't understand everything! Try not to be too influenced by the dominant rhythm. Instead, decide which are the most important words in each line and use the regular metre to drive them forward to the listeners.

Blank verse

Shakespeare's plays are mainly written in 'blank verse', the form preferred by most dramatists in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. It is a very flexible form, which is capable – like the human speaking voice – of a wide range of tones. Basically the lines, which are unrhymed, are ten syllables long. The syllables have alternating stresses, just like normal English speech; and they divide into five 'feet'. The technical name for this is 'iambic pentameter'.

Iambic pentameter

A perfectly regular iambic pentameter would have stresses in the following places. Notice how many of them sound like the normal rhythm of speech.

Macbeth
So foúl and faír a dáy I háve not seén.
Banquo
How fár is't cáll'd to Fórres? Whát are thése,
So wíther'd ánd so wíld in théir attíre,
That loók not líke th'inhábitants ó'th'eárth,
And yét are ón't? – Live yóu, or áre you aúght
That mán may quéstion? You seém to únderstánd me,
By eách at ónce her chóppy fínger láying
Upón her skínny líps; you shóuld be wómen,
And yét your beárds forbíd me tó intérpret
That yóu are só.
Macbeth
Speak íf you cán: what áre you?

Here the pentameter accommodates a variety of speech tones. Macbeth is casual in his conversation about the weather. Banquo is surprised at the appearance of these creatures, and fearful that they may be supernatural beings; he is comforted when they seem to understand him; and he can even make a nervous joke about their beards. Macbeth, speaking with some authority, completes a line started by Banquo – and so identifies himself with the other's feelings. Some words in Banquo's speech have had to be elided. This is when sounds or syllables are missed out and words are merged together as in 'th'inhabitants', and 'o'th'. This is usual in English – especially when the speaker is under pressure from some emotion (and Banquo is *very* surprised!).

Some variations

In this quotation, the lines are mainly regular in length and normal in iambic stress pattern. Sometimes Shakespeare deviates from the norm, writing lines that are longer or shorter than ten syllables, and varying the stress patterns for unusual emphasis. The verse line sometimes contains the grammatical unit of meaning:

'So wither'd and so wild in their attire'

This allows for a pause at the end of the line, before a new idea is started. At other times, the sense runs on from one line to the next:

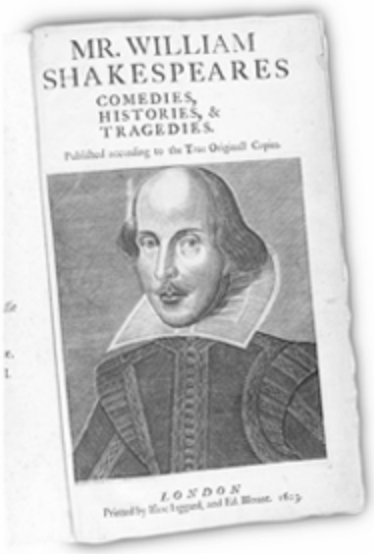
'are you aught
That man may question'.

This allows for the natural fluidity of speech, avoiding monotony but still maintaining the iambic rhythm.

Source, Text, and Date

Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of Scotland* (1577) provided most of the material Shakespeare needed for the writing of *Macbeth* – which was probably in the summer of 1606. The evidence for this date comes partly from within the play itself, when the drunken Porter in Act II, Scene iii imagines himself to be functioning at the gate of hell. Among the damned sinners he lets in is a certain 'equivocator', who has 'committed treason enough for God's sake', but who has not been able 'to equivocate to heaven'. This is a reference to a certain Father Garnet, a Jesuit priest who was tried and executed in the spring of 1606 for his part in the Gunpowder Plot to blow up the King and the Houses of Parliament on 5th November in the previous year. Father Garnet was known to have prayed for 'the good success of this great action, concerning the Catholic cause, in the beginning of Parliament', and then denied that his prayer had any reference to the Plot, maintaining that, in such a case of absolute necessity, it would not be illegal to change his mind or confirm that change of mind by oath.

The play did not appear in print until the First Folio collection of Shakespeare's *Works* was published in 1623. The text here shows some signs of revision (perhaps by Shakespeare himself) and adaptation (probably after Shakespeare's death). Certainly one scene (III, v) has been added, and another (IV, i) has been adjusted, both of them accommodating songs from *The Witch*, a much later play of uncertain date by Thomas Middleton.



The present edition is based on the text established by A. R. Braunmuller for the New Cambridge Shakespeare (1997).

For more information about the source of Macbeth, turn here.

Macbeth

Characters in the Play

Duncan	*King of Scotland*
Malcolm **Donaldbain**	*his sons*
Macbeth **Banquo**	*commanders of the Scottish army*
Macduff **Lennox** **Ross** **Menteith** **Angus** **Caithness**	*thanes of Scotland* (*thane*: a Scottish nobleman, just below the rank of earl in the English nobility)
Fleance	Banquo*'s son*
Boy	Macduff*'s son*
Seyton	*an officer attending* Macbeth
Siward	*Earl of Northumberland, commander of the English army*
Young Siward	*his son*
Lady Macbeth	
Lady Macduff	
Three Witches	
	A Captain A Porter An Old Man Three Murderers An English Doctor A Scottish Doctor A Gentlewoman attending Lady Macbeth

Hecate *goddess and queen of witches*
The Ghost of Banquo
Apparitions
Lords, Attendants, Soldiers, Servants, Messengers

Act 1

SCENE 1

The battlefield: *thunder and lightning*. *Enter three* Witches

First Witch
When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?
Second Witch
When the hurly-burly's[3] done,
When the battle's lost, and won[4].
Third Witch
That will be ere the set of sun.
First Witch
Where the place?
Second Witch
Upon the heath[7].
Third Witch
There to meet with Macbeth.
First Witch
I come, Graymalkin[9].
Second Witch
Paddock[10] calls.
Third Witch
Anon[11].
All
Fair is foul, and foul is fair[12],
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

[*Exeunt*[13]

Notes

Act 1 Scene 1

A Prologue of evil: the three witches arrange to meet Macbeth when the fighting is over.

3 *hurly-burly*: turmoil, tumult.

4 *When … won*: Winning and losing will become a major theme in the play.

7 *heath*: moorland, wilderness.

9 *Graymalkin*: grey cat; the Witch answers her attendant spirit (‘familiar’).

10 *Paddock*: toad.

11 *anon*: I’m coming.

12 *Fair … fair*: This paradox (= contradiction in terms) will recur throughout the play.

13 *Exeunt*: Directors of the play have found many different ways for the witches to leave the stage—either on foot through a stage door or a trap-door, or by some kind of flying. See *1*, 5, 4–5.

SCENE 2

The king's headquarters: *alarum*[0] *within*[0a]. *Enter* King Duncan, Malcolm, Donaldbain, Lennox, *with* Attendants*, meeting a bleeding* Captain

Duncan

What bloody man is that? He can report,
As seemeth by his plight[2], of the revolt
The newest[3] state.

Malcolm

This is the sergeant[3a]
Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
'Gainst my captivity[5]. Hail, brave friend;
Say to the king the knowledge of the broil[6]
As thou didst leave it.

Captain

Doubtful it stood,
As two spent[8] swimmers that do cling together
And choke their art[9]. The merciless Macdonald—
Worthy to be a rebel[10], for to that[10a]
The multiplying villainies of nature[11]
Do swarm upon him—from[12] the Western Isles
Of kerns and galloglasses is supplied[13],
And Fortune on his damned[14] quarrel smiling,
Show'd like a rebel's whore[15]. But all's too weak,
For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name—
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
Which smok'd[18] with bloody execution,
Like Valour's minion[19] carv'd out his passage
Till he fac'd the slave,
Which ne'er shook hands[21], nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd[22] him from the nave to th'chaps
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

Duncan

O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman.

Captain

As[25] whence the sun 'gins his reflection[25a],
Shipwrecking storms and direful thunders,
So from that spring whence comfort seem'd to come,
Discomfort swells[28]. Mark, King of Scotland, mark,
No sooner justice had, with valour arm'd,
Compell'd these skipping kerns to trust their heels[30],
But the Norwegian lord[31], surveying vantage[31a],
With furbish'd arms[32] and new supplies of men
Began a fresh assault.

Duncan

Dismay'd not this our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?

Captain

Yes, as sparrows, eagles, or the hare, the lion.
If I say sooth[36], I must report they were
As cannons over-charg'd with double cracks[37];
So they doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe.
Except[39] they meant to bathe in reeking[39a] wounds
Or memorize another Golgotha[40],
I cannot tell.
But I am faint, my gashes cry for help.

Duncan

So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;
They smack[44] of honour both. Go get him surgeons.

[*Exit* Captain, *attended*

Enter Ross *and* Angus

Who comes here?

Malcolm

The worthy Thane[45] of Ross.

Lennox

What a haste looks through his eyes[46]! So should he look
That seems to speak things strange.

Ross

God save the king.

Duncan

Whence cam'st thou, worthy thane?

Ross

From Fife, great king,

Where the Norwegian banners flout[49] the sky
And fan our people cold.
Norway himself[51], with terrible numbers,
Assisted by that most disloyal traitor,
The Thane of Cawdor, began a dismal conflict,
Till that Bellona's bridegroom[54], lapp'd in proof[54a],
Confronted him with self-comparisons[55],
Point[56] against point, rebellious arm 'gainst arm,
Curbing his lavish[57] spirit. And to conclude,
The victory fell on us—

Duncan

Great happiness!—

Ross

That now Sweno,

The Norways' king, craves composition[59].
Nor would we deign him burial of his men
Till he disbursed at[61] Saint Colm's Inch[61a]
Ten thousand dollars[62] to our general use.

Duncan

No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive
Our bosom interest[64]. Go pronounce his present death[64a]
And with his former title[65] greet Macbeth.

Ross

I'll see it done.

Duncan

What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won[67].

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 1 Scene 2

King Duncan hears good news of the battle: Banquo and Macbeth have fought valiantly against his enemies, and the king rewards Macbeth with a new title.

0s.d. *Alarum*: A trumpet call to arms; this is enough to identify the scene's location.
within: offstage.

2 *as … plight*: his condition suggests.

3 *newest*: latest.
sergeant: This was a higher rank than it is today.

5 *'Gainst my captivity*: so that I was not captured.

6 *broil*: conflict.

8 *spent*: exhausted.

9 *choke their art*: defeat their own efforts.

10 *Worthy … rebel*: only fit to be a traitor.
for to that: because.

11 *villainies of nature*: evils within creation.

12–13 *from … supplied*: had reinforcements of foot-soldiers ('kerns') and fighting-men with battle-axes ('galloglasses') from Ireland and the Hebrides ('the Western Isles').

14 *damned*: damnèd.

15 *a rebel's whore*: a treacherous prostitute.

18 *smok'd*: steamed.

19 *minion*: favourite.

21 *ne'er shook hands*: never parted from him.

22 *unseam'd … chaps*: ripped him open from navel to jaws.

25–8 *As … swells*: just as stormy weather can come from the east, so further trouble arose from a source which should have brought help.
'gins his reflection: begins shining.

30 *Compell'd … heels*: forced these panic-stricken ruffians to run away.

31 *the Norwegian lord*: i.e. Sweno, King of Norway (who invaded Scotland in 1041).
surveying vantage: seizing his advantage.

32 *furbish'd arms*: reinforced armaments.

36 *sooth*: truth.

37 *double cracks*: twice as much ammunition as usual.

39 *Except*: unless.

reeking: steaming with blood.

40 *memorize … Golgotha*: make this scene of bloodshed as memorable as the scene of Christ's crucifixion.

44 *smack*: taste.

45 *Thane*: the head of the clan (= Scottish family or tribe).

46 *What … eyes:* his eyes look as though he is in a hurry.

49 *flout*: mock; the Norwegian flags had no right to be in Fife.

51 *Norway himself*: the king of Norway.

54 *Bellona's bridegroom*: Macbeth, looking like the husband of the Roman goddess of war.

lapp'd in proof: clad in strong armour.

55 *self-comparisons*: equal terms.

56 *Point*: sword.

57 *lavish*: unrestrained, impetuous.

59 *craves composition*: seeks to make peace.

61 *disbursed*: disbursèd; paid.

Saint Colm's Inch: Inchcolm, an island in the Firth of Forth.

62 *dollars*: silver coins (German *thaler*).

64 *bosom interest*: trusting confidence.

present death: immediate death sentence.

65 *former title*: i.e. 'Thane of Cawdor'; see '*Macbeth*: the source', here.

67 *lost … won*: See *1*, 1, 4.

SCENE 3

The heath: *thunder*. *Enter the three* Witches

First Witch

Where hast thou been, sister?

Second Witch

Killing swine[2].

Third Witch

Sister, where thou?

First Witch

A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap
And munch'd, and munch'd, and munch'd. 'Give me', quoth[4] I.
'Aroint[5] thee, witch', the rump-fed runnion[5a] cries.
Her husband's to Aleppo[6] gone, master[6a] o'th'Tiger[6b]:
But in a sieve I'll thither sail[7],
And like a rat without a tail,
I'll do[9], I'll do, and I'll do.

Second Witch

I'll give thee a wind[10].

First Witch

Thou'rt kind.

Third Witch

And I another.

First Witch

I myself have all the other[13],
And the very ports they blow[14],
All the quarters[15] that they know
I'th'shipman's card[16].
I'll drain him[17] dry as hay:
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his penthouse[19] lid;
He shall live a man forbid[20].
Weary sennights[21] nine times nine,
Shall he dwindle, peak[22], and pine.

Though his bark[23] cannot be lost[23a],
Yet it shall be tempest-toss'd.
Look what I have.

Second Witch

Show me, show me.

First Witch

Here I have a pilot's thumb,
Wreck'd as homeward he did come.

Drum within

Third Witch

A drum, a drum;
Macbeth doth come.

All

The weïrd[30] sisters, hand in hand,
Posters[31] of the sea and land,
Thus do go, about, about,
Thrice to thine[33], and thrice to mine,
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace, the charm's wound up[35].

Enter Macbeth *and* Banquo

Macbeth

So foul and fair[36] a day I have not seen.

Banquo

How[37] far is't called to Forres[37a]? What are these,
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth,
And yet are on't?—Live you, or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her choppy[42] finger laying
Upon her skinny lips; you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.

Macbeth

Speak if you can: what are you?

First Witch

All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Glamis[46].

Second Witch

All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor[47].

Third Witch

All hail Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter.

Banquo

Good sir, why do you start[49] and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair?—I'th'name of truth
Are ye fantastical[51], or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? My[52] noble partner
You greet with present grace and great prediction
Of noble having and of royal hope
That he seems rapt withal[55]. To me you speak not.
If you can look into the seeds of time[56]
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favours nor your hate.

First Witch

Hail.

Second Witch

Hail.

Third Witch

Hail.

First Witch

Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

Second Witch

Not so happy[64], yet much happier.

Third Witch

Thou shalt get[65] kings, though thou be none.
So all hail Macbeth and Banquo.

First Witch

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail[67].

Macbeth

Stay, you imperfect[68] speakers. Tell me more.
By Finel's[69] death, I know I am Thane of Glamis,
But how of Cawdor? The Thane[70] of Cawdor lives
A prosperous gentleman[71], and to be king
Stands not within the prospect of belief[72],
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence
You owe this strange intelligence[74], or why
Upon this blasted[75] heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge[76] you.

Witches *vanish*

Banquo

The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither are they vanish'd?

Macbeth

Into the air, and what seem'd corporal[79],
Melted, as breath into the wind. Would[80] they had stay'd.

Banquo

Were such things here as we do speak about?
Or have we eaten on the insane root[82],
That takes the reason prisoner?

Macbeth

Your children shall be kings.

Banquo

You shall be king.

Macbeth

And Thane of Cawdor too: went it not so?

Banquo

To th'selfsame tune and words—who's here?

Enter Ross *and* Angus

Ross

The king hath happily receiv'd, Macbeth,

The news of thy success, and when he reads[88]
Thy personal venture[89] in the rebels' sight,
His wonders[90] and his praises do contend
Which should be thine or his[91]. Silenc'd with that,
In viewing o'er the rest o'th'selfsame[92] day,
He finds thee in the stout[93] Norwegian ranks,
Nothing afeard[94] of what thyself didst make,
Strange images of death. As thick[95] as tale
Came post with post[96], and every one did bear
Thy praises in his kingdom's great defence,
And pour'd them down before him.

Angus

We[98] are sent

To give thee from our royal master thanks;
Only to herald thee into his sight,
Not pay thee[101].

Ross

And for an earnest[102] of a greater honour,
He bade me, from him, call thee Thane of Cawdor:
In which addition[104], hail most worthy thane,
For it is thine.

Banquo

What, can the devil speak true?

Macbeth

The Thane of Cawdor lives. Why do you dress[106] me
In borrow'd robes[107]?

Angus

Who[107a] was the thane, lives yet,
But under heavy judgement bears that life
Which he deserves to lose.
Whether he was combin'd with those of Norway,
Or did line[111] the rebel with hidden help
And vantage[112], or that with both he labour'd
In his country's wrack[113], I know not,
But treasons capital[114], confess'd and prov'd,

Have overthrown him.

Macbeth

[*Aside*] Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor:
The greatest[116] is behind.—Thanks for your pains[116a].—
[*To* Banquo] Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me[118]
Promis'd no less to them?

Banquo

That trusted home[119],
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown[120],
Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange,
And oftentimes[122], to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence[125].—
Cousins[126], a word, I pray you.

Macbeth

[*Aside*] Two truths are told,
As happy prologues[127] to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme[128].—I thank you, gentlemen.—
This[129] supernatural soliciting[129a]
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion,
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated[135] heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature[136]? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought[138], whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smother'd in surmise[140], and nothing[140a] is,
But what is not[141].

Banquo

Look how our partner's rapt[141a].

Macbeth

If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me
Without my stir[143].

Banquo

New honours come upon him
Like[144] our strange garments, cleave[144a] not to their mould,
But with the aid of use[145].

Macbeth

Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day[146].

Banquo

Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure[147].

Macbeth

Give me your favour[148]. My dull brain was wrought[148a]
With things forgotten. Kind gentlemen, your pains[149]
Are register'd[150] where every day I turn
The leaf[151a] to read them[151]. Let us toward the king.
[*To* Banquo] Think upon what hath chanc'd[152] and at
more time[152a],
The interim having weigh'd[153] it, let us speak
Our free hearts[154] each to other.

Banquo

Very gladly.

Macbeth

Till then, enough.—Come, friends.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 1 Scene 3

The Witches speak strange prophecies to Macbeth and Banquo—and the first prophecy comes true.

2 *Killing swine*: Witches were often accused of harming livestock.

4 *quoth*: said.

5 *Aroint*: get away with you.

rump-fed runnion: fat-bottomed old woman; the abusive expression (Shakespeare's own coinage) has no specific meaning.

6 *Aleppo*: A trading city in northern Syria.

master: captain.

Tiger: A common name for a ship.

7 *sieve … sail*: This was thought to be common practice for witches.

9 *do*: work on him; the witch probably intends some kind of fornication.

10 *give … wind*: Witches were believed to have power to control the winds.

13 *the other*: i.e. the other winds.

14 *the very … blow*: even the ports where these winds blow (so that the ships cannot take refuge).

15 *quarters*: directions.

16 *card*: compass, chart.

17 *drain him*: exhaust him (probably with enforced sexual intercourse).

19 *penthouse lid*: eyelid (overhanging his eye).

20 *forbid*: cursed.

21 *sennights*: weeks.

22 *peak, and pine*: waste away.

23 *bark*: ship.

cannot be lost: The witches could injure human beings, but not kill them.

30 *weïrd*: supernatural, mystic.

31 *Posters*: high-speed travellers.

33 *to thine*: in your direction.

35 *wound up*: complete.

36 *foul and fair*: i.e. the weather has been foul but their fighting has been successful.

37–67 See '*Macbeth*: the source', here.

37 *How … Forres*: how far do you reckon we are from Forres.

42 *choppy*: chapped.

46 *Glamis*: This word is usually pronounced as a single syllable, 'Glahms'.

47 *Thane of Cawdor*: The audience knows already that Macbeth has been given this title (see *1*, 2, 65).

49 *start*: flinch, recoil.

51 *fantastical*: imaginary.

52–5 *My … withal*: you greet my noble friend with the title he already has and with such prophecy of further ennoblement and even royal status that he seems amazed with it all.

56 *seeds of time*: sources of the future.

64 *happy*: fortunate.

65 *get*: beget, father.

68 *imperfect*: obscure, ambiguous.

69 *Finel*: Macbeth's father.

70–1 *The Thane … gentleman*: Shakespeare seems to have forgotten that Macbeth has just been fighting Cawdor (*1*, 2, 54–7).

72 *Stands … belief*: is unbelievable.

74 *intelligence*: information.

75 *blasted*: blighted, barren.

76 *charge*: command.

79 *corporal*: substantial, having a body.

80 *Would*: I wish.

82 *insane root*: hemlock (which was thought to cause madness).

88 *reads*: recognizes.

89 *venture*: achievement.

90–1 *His wonders … his*: he doesn't know whether to be silent in wonder or speak out in your praises.

92 *selfsame*: that very same.

93 *stout*: valiant.

94 *Nothing afeard*: not at all frightened.

95–6 *As thick … post*: one messenger ('post') followed another, and every one brought a new tale.

98–101 *We … thee*: Ross and Angus have been sent to bring Macbeth into the king's presence and to express Duncan's thanks—which will not be Macbeth's only reward.

102 *earnest*: foretaste.

104 *addition*: title.

106–7 *dress … robes*: Clothes and images of clothing are very important throughout the play—and perhaps Ross invests Macbeth with some garment symbolic of his new title.

107 *Who*: he who.

111 *line*: reinforce (like the lining of a garment).

112 *vantage*: advantage (perhaps the traitor provided a base in Scotland for the foreign enemy's attack).

113 *wrack*: ruin, overthrow.

114 *capital*: deserving capital punishment.

116 *The greatest is behind*: the greatest prophecy is the last one, and has yet to come true.
pains: trouble.

118 *those … me*: those who promised me the title 'Thane of Cawdor'.

119 *home*: completely.

120 *enkindle … crown*: fire you to strive for the crown.

122–5 *oftentimes … consequence*: often, to bring about our damnation, the agents of evil tell us simple truths to make us trust them, then they can deceive us in important matters.

126 *Cousins*: friends.

127–8 *prologues … theme*: Macbeth anticipates a mighty drama on the theme of kingship.

129–36 *This … nature*: Macbeth's uncertainty expresses itself in the 'seesaw' rhythms of these disturbing lines.

129 *soliciting*: persuasion.

135 *seated*: firmly fixed.

138–40 *My thought … surmise*: the very thought—although it's only a fantasy—shakes my entire being, and I can do nothing without thinking of it; Macbeth's state of mind is expressed as much in the irregular grammar as in the meanings of his words.

140–1 *nothing … is not*: nothing matters now except what is yet to come.

141 *rapt*: entranced; Banquo has already used this word to describe Macbeth (line 55).

143 *Without my stir*: Without any effort from me.

144–5 *Like … use*: like new clothes that don't fit our bodies until we are used to them.
cleave: cling.

146 *Time … day*: 'The longest day has an end' (proverbial).

147 *stay … leisure*: wait until you're free.

148 *favour*: indulgence.

wrought: agitated, perplexed.

149 *pains*: kindnesses, services.

150–1 *register'd … them*: recorded in my memory like a book that I read every day.

leaf: page of a book.

152 *chanc'd*: happened.

at more time: when we have more time, later.

153 *The … weigh'd it*: having thoroughly considered it in the meantime ('interim').

154 *free hearts*: what we really feel.

SCENE 4

The king's headquarters. *Flourish*[0]. *Enter* King Duncan, Lennox, Malcolm, Donaldbain, *and* Attendants

Duncan

Is execution done[1] on Cawdor, or not[1a]
Those in commission[2] yet return'd?

Malcolm

My liege[2a],
They are not yet come back. But I have spoke
With one that saw him die, who did report
That very frankly he confess'd his treasons,
Implor'd your highness' pardon, and set forth[6]
A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
Became[8] him like the leaving it. He died
As one that had been studied[9] in his death,
To throw away the dearest thing he ow'd[10]
As 'twere[11] a careless trifle.

Duncan

There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.

Enter Macbeth, Banquo, Ross, *and* Angus

O worthiest cousin,
The sin of my ingratitude even now
Was heavy on me. Thou art so far before,
That swiftest wing of recompense is slow
To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserv'd,
That the proportion both of thanks and payment
Might have been mine. Only I have left to say,
More is thy due than more than all can pay.

Macbeth

The service and the loyalty I owe,
In doing it, pays itself. Your highness' part
Is to receive our duties, and our duties
Are to your throne and state, children and servants,
Which do but what they should by doing everything
Safe toward your love and honour.

Duncan

Welcome hither.
I have begun to plant thee and will labour
To make thee full of growing. Noble Banquo,
That hast no less deserv'd, nor must be known
No less to have done so, let me enfold thee
And hold thee to my heart.

Banquo

There if I grow,
The harvest is your own.

Duncan

My plenteous joys,
Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves

In drops of sorrow. Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest[36], know:
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland[39], which honour must
Not unaccompanied invest him only,
But signs of nobleness like stars shall shine
On all deservers. [*To* Macbeth] From hence to Inverness[42]
And bind us further to you.

Macbeth

The rest is labour which is not us'd for you[44];
I'll be myself the harbinger[45] and make joyful
The hearing of my wife with your approach.
So humbly take my leave.

Duncan

My worthy Cawdor.

Macbeth

[*Aside*] The Prince of Cumberland: that is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires,
Let not light see my black and deep desires,
The eye wink at the hand[52]. Yet let that be,
Which the eye fears when it is done to see.

[*Exit*

Duncan

True, worthy Banquo, he is full so valiant[54],
And in his commendations I am fed;
It is a banquet to me. Let's after him,
Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome:
It is a peerless kinsman.

Flourish

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 1 Scene 4

King Duncan receives Macbeth and Banquo with gratitude for their achievements, then announces that his son Malcolm will succeed him on the throne of Scotland.

0s.d. *Flourish*: A fanfare heralding the approach of royalty.

1 *done*: carried out.
or not: or are not.

2 *in commission*: in charge of the execution.
liege: lord.

6 *set forth*: showed, professed.

8 *Became*: graced, befitted.

9 *studied*: practised.

10 *ow'd*: owned.

11 As *'twere*: as though it were.

11–12 *There's … face*: there's no way of telling what's in a man's mind just by looking on his face; the truth of this judgement will be demonstrated many times during the play.

12 *construction*: composition.

16 *before*: in doing deeds of merit.

18–20 *Would … mine*: I wish you deserved less, so that my rewards might have been in proportion.

23 *pays itself*: is its own reward.

26–7 *Which … honour*: it is no more than our duty to do everything we can to protect your love and honour.

30–1 *nor … less*: and must also be recognized to have deserved as much.

34 *Wanton*: lavish, profuse.

36 *nearest*: most closely related.

39 *Prince of Cumberland*: The title of the Scottish heir apparent (the equivalent of the English 'Prince of Wales'); see '*Macbeth*: the source', here.

42 *Inverness*: i.e. to Macbeth's castle.

44 *The … you*: everything is labour unless it is done for you.

45 *harbinger*: An officer of the royal household sent ahead to procure accommodation for the king.

52 *wink at the hand*: not see what the hand is doing.

54 *True … valiant*: Banquo seems to have been praising Macbeth to Duncan—whilst the audience was listening to Macbeth's thoughts, spoken '*aside*'.

SCENE 5

Inverness: Macbeth*'s castle*. *Enter* Lady Macbeth *alone*, *with a letter*

Lady Macbeth

[*Reads*] 'They met me in the day of success, and I have learned by the perfectest[2] report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt[5] in the wonder of it, came missives[6] from the king who all-hailed me[6a] Thane of Cawdor, by which title before these weïrd[7] sisters saluted me and referred me to the coming on of time, with "Hail, king that shalt be." This have I thought good to deliver[10] thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing[11] by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart and farewell.'

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promis'd; yet do I fear thy nature,
It is too full o'th'milk of human kindness[16]
To catch[17] the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness[19] should attend[19a] it. What thou wouldst highly[19b],
That wouldst thou holily[20]; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
That which cries, 'Thus thou must do' if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do,
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee[24] hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
And chastise with the valour of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round[27],
Which fate and metaphysical[28] aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.

Enter Attendant

What is your tidings[29]?

Attendant

The king comes here tonight.

Lady Macbeth

Thou'rt mad to say it.

Is not thy master with him? Who, were't so,
Would have inform'd for preparation[32].

Attendant

So please you, it is true: our thane is coming.
One of my fellows had the speed of him[34];
Who almost dead for breath[35], had scarcely more
Than would make up his message.

Lady Macbeth

Give him tending[36],
He brings great news.

[*Exit* Attendant

The raven himself is hoarse[37]
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me[40] here
And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull
Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse[43]
That no compunctious[44] visitings of nature
Shake my fell[45] purpose nor keep peace between
Th'effect and it[46]. Come to my woman's breasts
And take my milk for gall[47], you murd'ring ministers[47a],
Wherever in your sightless substances[48]
You wait on nature's mischief[49]. Come, thick[49a] night,
And pall thee[50] in the dunnest[50a] smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, 'Hold, hold.'

Enter Macbeth

Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor,

Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter[54],
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant[57].

Macbeth

My dearest love,
Duncan comes here tonight.

Lady Macbeth

And when goes hence?

Macbeth

Tomorrow, as he purposes.

Lady Macbeth

O never
Shall sun that morrow see.
Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile[62] the time,
Look like the time[63], bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue; look like th'innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
Must be provided for[66], and you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch[67],
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway[69] and masterdom.

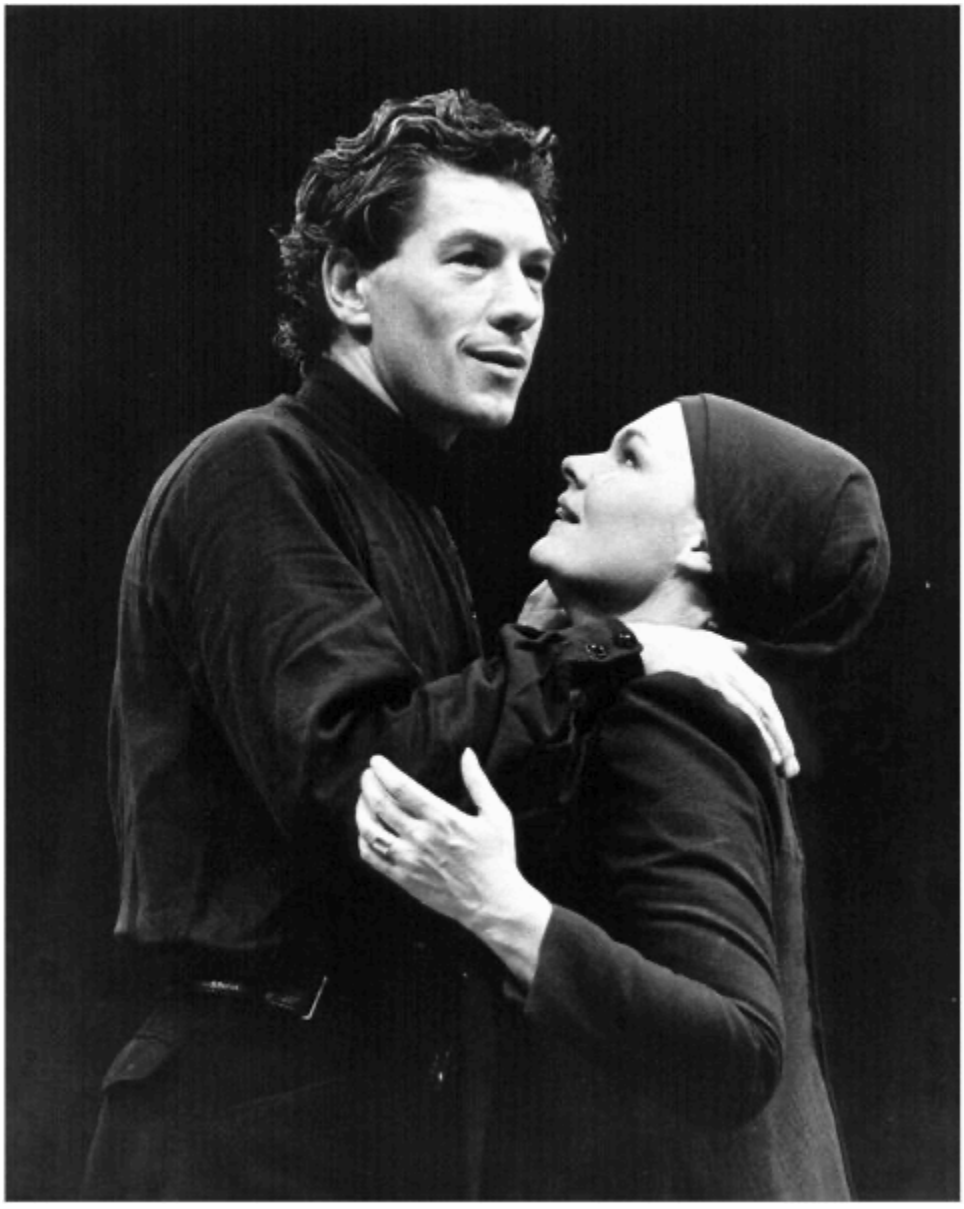
Macbeth

We will speak further—

Lady Macbeth

Only look up clear[70];
To alter favour ever is to fear[71].
Leave all the rest to me.

[*Exeunt*



‘To alter favour ever is to fear. Leave all the rest to me.’ (*1*, 5, 71–2) Ian McKellen as Macbeth and Judi Dench as Lady Macbeth, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1976.

Notes

Act 1 Scene 5

Lady Macbeth reads her husband's letter before welcoming him home and preparing to receive the king.

2 *perfectest*: most reliable.

5 *rapt*: entranced: compare *1*, 3, 141.

6 *missives*: messengers.

all-hailed me: greeted me with 'All hail'.

7 *weïrd*: mystic.

10 *deliver*: report to.

11 *dues of rejoicing*: your share of the rejoicing.

16 *milk … kindness*: natural compassion characteristic of human beings.

17 *catch*: snatch at.

19 *illness*: wickedness, cruelty.

attend: accompany.

highly: dearly.

20 *holily*: righteously.

24 *Hie thee*: hurry.

27 *the golden round*: the crown.

28 *metaphysical*: supernatural.

29 *tidings*: news.

32 *have … preparation*: have given warning so that we could make preparations.

34 *had … him*: travelled faster than he did.

35 *for breath*: for lack of breath.

36 *tending*: care, attention.

37 *The raven … hoarse*: Lady Macbeth compares the breathless messenger to a bird of ill omen, a carrion-eater always found on battlefields.

40 *unsex me*: take away everything that makes me a woman.

43 *remorse*: pity, compassion.

44 *compunctious … nature*: natural feelings of conscience.

45 *fell*: fierce.

46 *Th'effect and it*: the intention and its consequence.

47 *gall*: bile (a bitter fluid secreted in the liver).
murd'ring ministers: agents of evil.

48 *sightless substances*: Although the spirits are real ('substances'), they are invisible.

49 *wait … mischief*: lie in wait for something to go wrong in nature.
thick: dense, darkest.

50 *pall thee*: shroud yourself.
dunnest: murkiest.

54 *by … hereafter*: by the salutation 'That shalt be king hereafter' (*1*, 3, 48).

57 *The future in the instant*: the future greatness in the present moment.

62 *beguile*: deceive.

63 *Look like the time*: put on the appropriate appearance (i.e. of a host welcoming his guest).

66 *provided for*: prepared for.

67 *dispatch*: control, management.

69 *solely sovereign sway*: absolute regal command.

70 *clear*: honestly, cheerfully.

71 *To … fear*: fear always shows itself in a change of facial expression.

SCENE 6

Inverness: *approaching* Macbeth*'s castle*. *Hautboys*[0], *and torches*[0a]. *Enter* King Duncan, Malcolm, Donaldbain, Banquo, Lennox, Macduff, Ross, Angus, *and* Attendants

Duncan

This castle hath a pleasant seat[1]; the air
Nimbly[2] and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

Banquo

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet[4], does approve[4a]
By his lov'd mansionry[5] that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here. No jutty[6], frieze[6a],
Buttress, nor coign of vantage[7] but this bird
Hath made his pendent[8] bed and procreant cradle[8a];
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd
The air is delicate.

Enter Lady Macbeth

Duncan

See, see, our honour'd hostess.—The love[11]
That follows us sometime is our trouble,
Which still we thank as love[12]. Herein[13] I teach you
How you shall bid God yield[13a] us for your pains
And thank us for your trouble[14].

Lady Macbeth

All our service,
In every point twice done and then done double[16],
Were poor and single[17] business to contend[17a]
Against those honours deep and broad wherewith
Your majesty loads our house. For those of old[19],
And the late[20] dignities heap'd up to them,

We rest your hermits[21].

Duncan

Where's the Thane of Cawdor?
We cours'd[22] him at the heels and had a purpose
To be his purveyor[23], but he rides well,
And his great love, sharp as his spur, hath holp[24] him
To his home before us. Fair and noble hostess,
We are your[26] guest tonight.

Lady Macbeth

Your servants ever
Have theirs, themselves, and what is theirs in count
To make their audit at your highness' pleasure,
Still to return your own[29].

Duncan

Give me your hand;
Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly
And shall continue our graces towards him.
By your leave[32], hostess.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 1 Scene 6

King Duncan and his followers approach the castle and are welcomed by Lady Macbeth.

0 s.d. *Hautboys*: reed instruments, ancestors of the modern oboe.
torches: An indication that the scene takes place at night.

1 *seat*: setting, situation.

2 *Nimbly*: freshly.

4 *martlet*: house-martin, a summer migrant bird that often nests in churches.
approve: witness, give evidence.

5 *mansionry*: nest-building.

6 *jutty*: projecting part of building.
frieze: decorative band underneath cornice.

7 *coign of vantage*: convenient corner.

8 *pendent*: hanging.
procreant cradle: nest.

11–12 *The love … love*: sometimes it's a nuisance to have people offering me kindness,

but I am always ('still') grateful for it.

13–14 *Herein … trouble*: this is my way of teaching you to ask God to reward *me* for the trouble *you* are having to take, and also to thank *me* for providing the occasion for that trouble.

13 *yield*: reward.

16 *In … double*: if every part were done twice, and then twice again; Lady Macbeth continues the language of duplication and multiplication begun by the Captain (*1*, 2, 37–8), repeated by the weird sisters (*1*, 3, 33–4), and soon to be reiterated by Macbeth (*1*, 7, 12).

17 *single*: simple.
contend: compete.

19 *those of old*: those honours bestowed in the past.

20 *late*: recent.

21 *hermits*: persons bound by vow or fee to pray for someone.

22 *cours'd*: chased.

23 *purveyor*: official responsible for provisions and accommodation in the royal household.

24 *holp*: helped.

26–9 *Your … own*: your majesty's servants hold everything in trust ('in count') for your majesty; they will give an account ('make their audit') whenever you ask, and will always ('still') return everything back to you.

32 *By your leave*: with your permission (a courteous indication that Duncan is ready to enter the castle).

SCENE 7

Inside Macbeth*'s castle*. *Hautboys*[0]. *Torches*. *Enter a* Sewer[0a], *and divers*[0b] Servants *with dishes and service*[0c] *over*[0d] *the stage*. *Then enter* Macbeth

Macbeth

If[1] it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly[2]. If[2a] th'assassination
Could trammel up the consequence and catch
With his surcease, success[4], that but this blow[4a]
Might be the be-all and the end-all[5]—here[5a],
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time[6],
We'd jump[7] the life to come[7a]. But in these cases,
We[8] still have judgement here that we but teach
Bloody instructions[9], which being taught, return
To plague th'inventor. This even-handed[10] justice
Commends[11] th'ingredience[11a] of our poison'd chalice[11b]
To our own lips. He's here in double trust[12]:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides[16], this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek[17], hath been
So clear[18] in his great office, that his virtues[18a]
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd[19] against
The deep damnation of his taking-off[20].
And pity[21], like a naked newborn babe
Striding the blast[22], or heaven's cherubin[22a] hors'd
Upon the sightless couriers of the air[23],
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind[25]. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent[26], but only
Vaulting[27] ambition which o'erleaps itself
And falls on th'other[28]—

Enter Lady Macbeth

How now? What news?

Lady Macbeth

He has almost supp'd[29]. Why have you left the chamber?

Macbeth

Hath he ask'd for me?

Lady Macbeth

Know you not, he has?

Macbeth

We will proceed no further in this business.
He hath honour'd me of late, and I have[32] bought
Golden opinions from all sorts[33] of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss[34],
Not cast aside so soon.

Lady Macbeth

Was[35] the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself[36]? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now to look so green and pale[37]
At what it did so freely? From this time,
Such[39] I account thy love. Art thou afeard[39a]
To be the same in thine own act and valour,
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would',
Like the poor cat i'th'adage[45]?

Macbeth

Prithee[45a], peace.
I dare do all that may become[46] a man;
Who dares do more is none[47].

Lady Macbeth

What beast was't then
That made you break[48] this enterprise to me?
When you durst[49] do it, then you were a man.

And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor[51] time, nor place
Did then adhere[52], and yet you would make both.
They have made themselves and that their fitness now
Does unmake you[54]. I have given suck and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this.

Macbeth

If we should fail?

Lady Macbeth

We fail?
But screw your courage to the sticking-place[60],
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep,
Whereto[62] the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him[63], his[63a] two chamberlains[63b]
Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder[65] of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only[67]. When in swinish sleep[67a]
Their drenched[68] natures lies as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon
Th'unguarded Duncan? What not put[70] upon
His spongy[71] officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell[72]?

Macbeth

Bring forth men-children only,
For thy undaunted mettle[73] should compose
Nothing but males. Will it not be receiv'd[74],
When we have mark'd with blood those sleepy two
Of his own chamber, and us'd their very[76] daggers,
That they have done't?

Lady Macbeth

Who[77] dares receive it other,
As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar
Upon his death[79]?

Macbeth

I am settled[79a] and bend[79b] up
Each corporal agent[80] to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock[81] the time with fairest show,
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 1 Scene 7

Macbeth leaves the state dinner, suddenly worried by what he is planning to do. But Lady Macbeth stirs up his spirits again.

0s.d. The scene takes place in the passageway between dining hall and kitchen.

Sewer: butler.

divers: various.

service: course of a meal.

over: across, from side to side.

1–2 *If … quickly*: if the business of the murder were ended ('done') as soon as the deed is performed ('done'), then it would be a good thing to have it carried out ('done') quickly.

2–4 *if … success*: if the assassination could prevent ('trammel up') any further consequences and achieve its success with Duncan's death ('surcease').

4 *that but this blow*: this single blow.

5 *be-all … end-all*: all that is needed to end everything.

5–6 *here … time*: in this life; Macbeth imagines himself standing in the shallow water ('shoal') of a river-bank.

7 *We'd … come*: I would risk the chance of any life after death; Macbeth uses the 'royal plural' when speaking in soliloquy.

jump: hazard, risk; leap over.

8–9 *We … instructions*: we are always ('still') punished here because we only ('but') teach others our own crimes—which they commit against us ('the inventor').

10 *even-handed*: impartial.

11 *Commends*: recommends, prescribes.

ingredience: mixture of ingredients.

chalice: ceremonial cup.

12 *in double trust*: a) as a monarch and kinsman; b) as a guest.

16 *Besides*: in addition to that.

17 *borne … meek*: exercised his royal powers so modestly.

18 *clear*: faultless, honourable.

18–25 *his virtues … wind*: The suggestiveness of these lines is more powerful than their logical sense.

19 *trumpet-tongu'd*: sounding like trumpets.

20 *taking-off*: murder.

21–2 *pity … blast*: Macbeth visualizes Pity with all the weakness of a human baby yet able to soar over the blasts of the 'trumpet-tongu'd angels'.

22–3 *cherubin … air*: angels riding on the invisible winds.

26 *intent*: intention (to murder Duncan).

27–8 *Vaulting … other*: Macbeth's excessive ambition is like a horse that tries to jump too high and falls on the other side of the fence.

29 *supp'd*: finished dining.

32–4 *I have … gloss*: Macbeth wants to enjoy the praises he has earned ('bought') as though they were new clothes (compare *1*, 3, 106–7).

33 *sorts*: social ranks.

35–6 *Was … yourself*: Here 'hope' is both a person, and the garment he wears.

37 *green and pale*: sickly (as if the 'hope' had a hangover).

39 *Such*: i.e. as a cowardly drunk with a hangover, scared at what he had planned to do when he was drunk.

afeard: afraid.

45 *adage*: Lady Macbeth refers to the proverb ('The cat would eat fish, but will not wet her feet').

Prithee: I pray you.

46 *become*: be fitting for.

47 *is none*: is not a man (i.e. he is subhuman or monstrous).

48 *break*: reveal, mention.

49 *durst*: dared.

51–4 *Nor … you*: neither time nor place was suitable then, yet you would make them suitable; now they are both right—and the very fact that they are right ('that their fitness') makes you lose your nerve ('unmake you').

52 *adhere*: agree.

60 *screw … sticking-place*: tighten your courage to the limit; the metaphor is from tightening the strings of a lute (or modern guitar) to tune the instrument.

62–3 *Whereto … him*: and his long journey today will all the more quickly encourage him to sleep soundly.

63–7 *his … only*: I will overpower ('convince') his two attendants with wine and liquor so that their memory, which should guard the brain, shall be an intoxicated haze ('fume'), and the brain itself—the receptacle of reason—shall be of no more use than an alchemist's distilling-flask ('limbeck').

63 *chamberlains*: attendants in the royal bedchamber.

65 *warder*: guard, watchman.

67 *in swinish sleep*: sleeping like pigs.

68 *drenched*: drenchèd; soaked, sozzled.

70 *put*: blame.

71 *spongy*: sponge-like.

72 *quell*: kill, bloodshed.

73 *mettle*: spirit, courage.

74 *receiv'd*: believed.

76 *very*: own.

77–9 *Who … death*: who will dare believe anything else, since we shall cry out about his death with so much grief and noise.

79 *settled*: decided.

bend: brace.

80 *corporal agent*: physical faculty.

81 *mock*: deceive.

Act 2

SCENE 1

Macbeth's *castle*: *enter* Banquo, *and* Fleance, *with a* Torch-bearer *before him*

Banquo

How goes the night, boy?

Fleance

The moon is down; I have not heard the clock.

Banquo

And she[3] goes down at twelve.

Fleance

I take't, 'tis later, sir.

Banquo

Hold, take my sword.—There's husbandry[4] in heaven,
Their candles[5] are all out.—Take thee that[5a] too.
A heavy[6] summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep[7]; merciful powers,
Restrain[8] in me the cursed[8a] thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose[9].

Enter Macbeth*, and a* Servant *with a torch*

Give me my sword[9a]—
Who's there?

Macbeth

A friend.

Banquo

What, sir, not yet at rest? The king's abed.
He hath been in unusual pleasure
And sent forth great largess[14] to your offices[14a].
This diamond he greets your wife withal[15],

Gives Macbeth *a diamond*

By the name of most kind hostess, and shut up[16]

In measureless content.

Macbeth

Being[17] unprepar'd,
Our will became the servant to defect,
Which else should free have wrought[19].

Banquo

All's well.
I dream'd last night of the three weïrd sisters;
To you they have show'd some truth.

Macbeth

I think not of them;
Yet when we can entreat an hour to serve,
We would spend it in some words upon that business,
If you would grant the time.

Banquo

At your kind'st leisure.

Macbeth

If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis[25],
It shall make honour for you.

Banquo

So[26] I lose none
In seeking to augment it[27], but still keep
My bosom franchis'd[28] and allegiance clear[28a],
I shall be counsell'd.

Macbeth

Good repose the while[29].

Banquo

Thanks, sir; the like to you.

[*Exeunt* Banquo, Fleance, *and* Torch-bearer

Macbeth

[*To* Servant] Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready,
She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed.

[*Exit* Servant

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee:

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible[36]
To feeling as to sight[37]? Or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed[39] brain?
I see thee yet[40], in form as palpable[40a]
As this which now I draw.
Thou marshall'st me[42] the way that I was going,
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine[44] eyes are made the fools o'th'other senses,
Or else worth all the rest[45]. I see thee still,
And on thy blade and dudgeon[46] gouts[46a] of blood,
Which was not so before. There's no such thing:
It is the bloody business which informs[48]
Thus to mine eyes[49]. Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep. Witchcraft celebrates[51]
Pale Hecate's[52] off'rings, and wither'd murder,
Alarum'd[53] by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch[54], thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides[55], towards his design[55a]
Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set[56] earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate[58] of my whereabout,
And take the present horror from the time[59],
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives;
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives[61].

A bell rings

I go, and it is done. The bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan, for it is a knell[63]
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

[*Exit*

Notes

Act 2 Scene 1

Banquo and his son Fleance are going to bed when they encounter Macbeth, who is preparing himself for his grim task.

3 *she*: the moon.

4 *husbandry*: economy, good housekeeping.

5 *candles*: the stars.

that: Banquo, preparing for bed, perhaps gives his cloak to Fleance.

6–7 *A heavy … sleep*: I feel as heavy as lead, and my bed is calling to me, but yet I don't want to sleep.

8–9 *Restrain … repose*: control the nightmares ('those cursed thoughts') that come when the body is at rest; Banquo is afraid of the thoughts provoked by the witches' prophecies.

8 *cursed*: cursèd.

9 *Give … sword*: Banquo is tense and alert even inside the castle.

14 *largess*: presents.

offices: staff.

15 *withal*: with (a form often used to end a clause or sentence).

16 *shut up*: went to bed, closed up the curtains of his bed.

17–19 *Being … wrought*: because we were not prepared, we had to manage with very little ('defect' = deficiency) and could not be as generous ('free') as we wished.

25 *If … 'tis*: if you will follow my advice, when the time comes.

26–7 *So … augment it*: provided that I don't lose honour by trying to increase it.

28 *bosom franchis'd*: heart free from obligation.

clear: loyal (to the king).

29 *the while*: meanwhile.

36–7 *sensible … sight*: able to be felt as well as seen.

39 *heat-oppressed*: heat-oppressèd; over-heated, disturbed.

40 *yet*: still

palpable: tangible.

42 *marshall'st me*: are guiding me, beckon me.

44–5 *Mine … rest*: either my eyes are deceived, or else they are better than all my other senses.

46 *dudgeon*: hilt, handle.

gouts: splashes (from the French *goutte* = drop).

48–9 *informs … eyes*: takes shape in this way before my eyes.

51 *celebrates*: performs the rites ('offerings').

52 *Hecate*: goddess of the moon and of witchcraft; the name has only two syllables here.

53 *Alarum'd*: aroused, called to action (see *1*, 2, 0s.d.).

54 *Whose … watch*: i.e. the wolf's howl tells the time to Murder.

55 *Tarquin's … strides*: Murder, personified in line 52, is now compared to the Roman tyrant, Tarquin, who came in the night to ravish (= rape) his friend's wife, Lucrece; the

story is told in Shakespeare's narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*.

design: aim.

56 *firm-set*: stable.

58 *prate*: blab, tell tales.

59 *take … time*: break this deadly silence which is so appropriate for the present moment.

61 *Words … gives*: the cold breath of words only cools down hot deeds.

63 *knell*: funeral bell rung to announce a death.

SCENE 2

Macbeth*'s castle*; *enter* Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth

That[1] which hath made them drunk, hath made me bold;
What hath quench'd them, hath given me fire[2].

An owl[3] *shrieks*

Hark, peace!
It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman
Which gives the stern'st good-night[4]. He is about it[4a].
The doors are open, and the surfeited grooms[5]
Do mock their charge with snores. I have drugg'd their possets[6],
That death[7] and nature do contend about them,
Whether they live, or die[8].

Enter Macbeth *with two bloody daggers*

Macbeth

Who's there? What ho?

Lady Macbeth

Alack[9], I am afraid they have awak'd,
And 'tis not done; th'attempt[10] and not the deed
Confounds[11] us. Hark! I laid their daggers ready,
He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't[13]. My husband?

Macbeth

I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

Lady Macbeth

I heard the owl scream and the crickets[15] cry.
Did not you speak?

Macbeth

When?

Lady Macbeth

Now.

Macbeth

As I descended?

Lady Macbeth

Ay.

Macbeth

Hark, who lies i'th'second chamber?

Lady Macbeth

Donaldbain.

Macbeth

This is a sorry sight.

Lady Macbeth

A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight[23].

Macbeth

There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried 'Murder!',
That they did wake each other; I stood, and heard them,
But they did say their prayers and address'd them[27]
Again to sleep.

Lady Macbeth

There are two lodg'd together[28].

Macbeth

One cried 'God bless us!' and 'Amen' the other,
As[30] they had seen me with these hangman's hands[30a].
List'ning their fear, I could not say 'Amen'
When they did say 'God bless us.'

Lady Macbeth

Consider it not so deeply.

Macbeth

But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?
I had most need of blessing and 'Amen'
Stuck in my throat.

Lady Macbeth

These deeds must not be thought[36]
After these ways; so, it will make us mad.

Macbeth

Methought[38] I heard a voice cry, ‘Sleep no more:
Macbeth does murder sleep’, the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell’d[40] sleeve[40a] of care,
The death of each day’s life, sore labour’s bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature’s second course[42],
Chief nourisher in life’s feast.

Lady Macbeth

What do you mean?

Macbeth

Still it cried, ‘Sleep no more’ to all the house;
‘Glamis hath murder’d sleep’, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more: Macbeth shall sleep no more.

Lady Macbeth

Who was it, that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend[48] your noble strength to think
So brain-sickly of things. Go get some water
And wash this filthy witness[50] from your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there. Go carry them and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.

Macbeth

I’ll go no more.

I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on’t again, I dare not.

Lady Macbeth

Infirm of purpose!

Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures; ’tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil[58]. If he do bleed,
I’ll gild[59] the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt[60].

[*Exit*

Knock within[60a]

Macbeth

Whence is that knocking?
How is't with me, when every noise appals[61] me?
What hands are here? Ha: they pluck out mine eyes[62].
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No: this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas[65] incarnadine[65a],
Making the green one red.

Enter Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth
My hands are of your colour, but I shame[67]
To wear a heart so white[68].

Knock within

I hear a knocking
At the south entry. Retire we to our chamber;
A little water clears us of this deed.
How easy is it then! Your[71] constancy
Hath left you unattended[72].

Knock within

Hark, more knocking.
Get on your night-gown[73], lest occasion call us[73a]
And show us to be watchers[74]. Be not lost
So poorly in your thoughts.

Macbeth
To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself[76].

Knock within

Wake Duncan with thy knocking: I would thou couldst.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 2 Scene 2

Duncan has been murdered. Macbeth is already regretting his action, and Lady Macbeth takes the daggers away from him.

1–2 *That … fire*: Like Duncan's two chamberlains, Lady Macbeth has been drinking.

3 *owl*: The owl (like the raven) was thought to be a bird of ill omen and is now compared to the night watchman who rings his bell outside the cells of prisoners condemned to death.

4 *the … night*: the last good-night.
about it: doing the deed.

5 *surfeited grooms*: drunken servants.

6 *possets*: hot milky drinks with added liquor and spices, 'nightcaps'.

7–8 *death … die*: death and life are struggling to decide whether the attendants live or die.

9–13 *Alack … done't*: Lady Macbeth does not immediately see her husband—perhaps because he enters upstage behind her, or because the scene is in (imaginary) darkness.

10 *th'attempt*: the attempt to kill Duncan.

11 *confounds*: ruins.

15 *crickets*: The Elizabethans believed that the chirping of these insects was a herald of death.

23 *a sorry sight*: a miserable sight; Macbeth is probably looking at his hands, which are holding the daggers.

27 *address'd them*: prepared themselves.

28 *lodg'd together*: sharing one bed (a common Elizabethan practice).

30 *As*: as if.

hangman's hands: The hangman's duties included disembowelling the body of the hanged man.

36 *thought*: considered.

38 *Methought*: it seemed to me.

40 *ravell'd*: frayed; twisted.

sleeve: part of garment; filament of silk (*sleave*).

42 *second course*: main dish (following the 'starter').

48 *unbend*: slacken, weaken; the word continues the metaphor started in *1*, 7, 60 and 79.

50 *witness*: evidence.

58 *a painted devil*: the picture of a devil.

59-60 *gild … guilt*: Lady Macbeth makes a cruel pun.

60s.d. *Knock within*: The offstage knocking is the first sign that the outside world is reacting (without yet knowing it) to the crime that has been committed.

61 *appals*: terrifies, dismays.

62 *they … eyes*: Macbeth's eyes seem to be falling out of his head at the sight of his bloody hands.

65 *multitudinous seas*: numerous oceans, all the world's many seas.

incarnadine: stain red. See 'About the Play', here.

67 *I shame*: I would be ashamed.

68 *white*: bloodless.

71–2 *your … unattended*: your strength of purpose has deserted you, you've lost your

nerve.

73 *night-gown*: dressing-gown.

lest … us: in case there is need to call for us.

74 *to be watchers*: to be awake.

76 *To know … myself*: to recognize what I have done it would be better if I forgot who I am; as a murderer, Macbeth will have a new identity.

‘I pray you, remember the porter.’ (*2*, 3, 18–19) Adrian Schiller as the Porter, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1996.

SCENE 3

Macbeth’*s castle: enter a* Porter. *Knocking within*

Porter

Here’s a knocking indeed: if a man were porter of hell-gate[1], he should have old[2] turning the key. [*Knock*] Knock, knock, knock. Who’s there i’th’name of Beelzebub[4]? Here’s[4a] a farmer that hanged himself on th’expectation of plenty[5]. Come in time—have napkins enough about you, here you’ll sweat for’t. [*Knock*] Knock, knock. Who’s there in th’other devil’s name? Faith[8], here’s an equivocator[8a] that could swear in both the scales[9] against either scale, who committed treason enough for God’s sake[10], yet could not equivocate to heaven[11]. O, come in, equivocator. [*Knock*] Knock, knock, knock. Who’s there? Faith, here’s an English tailor[12] come hither for stealing out of a French hose[13]. Come in, tailor, here you may roast your

goose[14]. [*Knock*] Knock, knock.
Never at quiet: what are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose[17] way to th'everlasting bonfire. [*Knock*] Anon[18], anon. I pray you, remember[19] the porter[19a]. [*Opens door*]

Enter Macduff *and* Lennox

Macduff
Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed,
That you do lie so late?
Porter
Faith, sir, we were carousing[22] till the second cock[22a], and drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things[23].
Macduff
What three things does drink especially provoke[24]?
Porter
Marry[25], sir, nose-painting[25a], sleep, and urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes, and unprovokes: it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. Therefore much drink may be said to be an equivocator[28] with lechery: it makes[28a] him, and it mars him[29]; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it persuades him and disheartens him, makes him stand to and not stand to. In conclusion, equivocates[31] him in a sleep[32], and giving him the lie[32a], leaves him.
Macduff
I believe drink gave thee the lie last night.
Porter
That it did, sir, i'the very throat[34] on me, but I requited him[34a] for his lie, and, I think, being too strong for him, though he took up my legs[36] sometime, yet I made a shift[36a] to cast him[37].

Enter Macbeth[37a]

Macduff
Is thy master stirring?
Our knocking has awak'd him: here he comes.

[*Exit* Porter

Lennox

Good morrow, noble sir.

Macbeth

Good morrow, both.

Macduff

Is the king stirring[38], worthy thane?

Macbeth

Not yet.

Macduff

He did command me to call timely[42] on him;
I have almost slipp'd the hour[43].

Macbeth

I'll bring you to him.

Macduff

I know this is a joyful trouble to you, but yet 'tis one.

Macbeth

The labour we delight in physics pain. This is the door.

Macduff

I'll make so bold to call, for 'tis my limited[46] service.

[*Exit*

Lennox

Goes the king hence today?

Macbeth

He does—he did appoint so.

Lennox

The night has been unruly: where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i'th'air, strange screams of death
And prophesying[52] with accents terrible
Of dire[53] combustion and confus'd events,
New hatch'd to th'woeful time[54]. The obscure bird[54a]
Clamour'd the livelong night[55]. Some say, the earth
Was feverous and did shake.

Macbeth

’Twas a rough night.

Lennox

My[57] young remembrance cannot parallel
A fellow to it[58].

Enter Macduff

Macduff

O horror, horror, horror,
Tongue nor heart cannot conceive, nor name thee.

Macbeth and **Lennox**

What’s the matter?

Macduff

Confusion[62] now hath made his masterpiece:
Most sacrilegious[63] murder hath broke ope[63a]
The Lord’s anointed temple[64] and stole thence
The life o’th’building.

Macbeth

What is’t you say, the life?

Lennox

Mean you his majesty?

Macduff

Approach the chamber and destroy your sight
With a new Gorgon[69]. Do not bid me speak:
See and then speak yourselves.

[*Exeunt* Macbeth *and* Lennox

Awake, awake!
Ring the alarum bell! Murder and treason!
Banquo and Donaldbain! Malcolm, awake,
Shake[73] off this downy[73a] sleep, death’s counterfeit,
And look on death itself[74]. Up, up, and see[74a]
The great doom’s image[75]. Malcolm, Banquo,
As from your graves rise up and walk like sprites[76]
To countenance[77] this horror.

Bell rings. *Enter* Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth

What's the business
That such a hideous trumpet[78] calls to parley[78a]
The sleepers of the house? Speak, speak.

Macduff

O gentle lady,
'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak.
The[81] repetition in a woman's ear
Would murder as it fell[82].—

Enter Banquo

O Banquo, Banquo,
Our royal master's murder'd.

Lady Macbeth

Woe, alas,
What, in our house?

Banquo

Too cruel, anywhere.
Dear Duff, I prithee contradict thyself
And say it is not so.

Enter Macbeth *and* Lennox

Macbeth

Had I but died an hour before this chance[87],
I had liv'd a blessed[88] time, for from this instant,
There's nothing serious in mortality[89].
All is but toys[90]; renown and grace is dead,
The wine[91] of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of[92].

Enter Malcolm *and* Donaldbain

Donaldbain

What is amiss?

Macbeth

You are, and do not know't.
The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood
Is stopp'd, the very source of it is stopp'd.

Macduff

Your royal father's murder'd.

Malcolm

O, by whom?

Lennox

Those of his chamber, as it seem'd, had done't.
Their hands and faces were all badg'd[98] with blood,
So were their daggers which, unwip'd, we found
Upon their pillows. They star'd and were distracted[100];
No man's life was to be trusted with them.

Macbeth

O, yet I do repent me of my fury
That I did kill them.

Macduff

Wherefore[103] did you so?

Macbeth

Who can be wise, amaz'd, temp'rate[104], and furious,
Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man.
Th'expedition[106] of my violent love
Outran the pauser[107], reason[107a]. Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin lac'd with his golden blood[108]
And his[109] gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature,
For ruin's wasteful entrance[110]. There the murderers[110a],
Steep'd[111] in the colours of their trade[111a]; their daggers
Unmannerly breech'd[112] with gore[112a]. Who could refrain[112b],
That had a heart to love and in that heart
Courage to make's[114] love known?

Lady Macbeth

Help me hence, ho.

Macduff

Look to the lady.

[*Exit* Lady Macbeth, *helped*

Malcolm

[*To* Donaldbain] Why do we hold our tongues, that[116] most may claim
This argument for ours[117]?

Donaldbain

[*To* Malcolm] What[117a] should be spoken here,
Where our fate hid in an auger hole[118] may rush
And seize us[119]? Let's away. Our tears are not yet brew'd[119a].

Malcolm

[*To* Donaldbain] Nor our strong sorrow upon the foot of motion[120].

Banquo

Look to the lady,
And when we have our naked frailties[122] hid
That suffer in exposure, let us meet
And question this most bloody piece of work
To know it further. Fears and scruples shake us:
In the great hand of God[126] I stand and thence
Against the undivulg'd pretence[127] I fight
Of treasonous malice.

Macduff

And so do I.

All

So all.

Macbeth

Let's briefly put on manly readiness[129]
And meet i'th'hall together.

All

Well contented.

[*Exeunt all but* Malcolm *and* Donaldbain

Malcolm

What will you do? Let's not consort[131] with them.
To show[132] an unfelt sorrow is an office
Which the false man does easy[133]. I'll to England.

Donaldbain

To Ireland, I. Our separated[134] fortune

Shall keep us both the safer[135]. Where we are,
There's daggers in men's smiles; the nea'er[136] in blood,
The nearer bloody[137].

Malcolm

This murderous shaft that's shot
Hath not yet lighted[138], and our safest way
Is to avoid the aim. Therefore to horse,
And let us not be dainty of leave-taking[140],
But shift[141] away. There's[141a] warrant in that theft
Which steals itself when there's no mercy left[142].

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 2 Scene 3

All is discovered. The Porter is roused from his drunken sleep by Macduff and Lennox, who try to wake the king and find he has been murdered. Macbeth panics, and kills Duncan's attendants—and Duncan's sons, afraid for their own safety, slip away secretly.

1 *hell-gate*: the entrance to hell.

2 *old*: plenty of.

4 *Beelzebub*: A popular (biblical) name for the devil.

4–19 *Here's … porter*: The Porter (a part played by the company's chief comic actor) introduces a selection of imaginary characters as they come through 'hell-gate'.

5 *plenty*: a good harvest (which would bring down the price of corn).

8 *Faith*: by my faith (a mild oath).

8–11 *an equivocator … heaven*: The Porter seems to be referring to the Jesuit Father Garnet, who tried to save his life with his specious arguments but who was executed in 1606 for complicity in the Gunpowder Plot: see 'Source, Date, and Text', p.xxix.

9 *scales*: weighing-scales, scales of justice.

10 *for God's sake*: A common oath, but perhaps specifically referring to the Jesuit priest's equivocal oaths.

12–13 *English tailor … French hose*: English fashions often imitated the French, and the tailor might have been over-economical with fabric.

14 *roast your goose*: heat up your iron ('goose' = tailor's long-handled iron).

17 *primrose*: easy, attractive.

18 *Anon*: immediately, I'm coming.

19 *remember*: i.e. with a tip for opening the gate.

22 *carousing*: celebrating, drinking.

till … cock: until the cock crowed for a second time (i.e. about 3 a.m.).

23 *a great … things*: The Porter, hoping for another tip, tries to engage the callers in a riddle.

24 *What … provoke*: Macduff picks up the cue and plays straight man to the Porter.

25 *Marry*: an abbreviated form of the mild oath 'By the Virgin Mary'.

nose-painting: making the nose red.

28 *equivocator*: double-dealer.

28–9 *makes … mars him*: rouses him to sexual activity, then makes him impotent.

31–2 *equivocates … sleep*: fulfils his desire only in a dream.

32 *giving … lie*: cheating him; throwing him down (as in wrestling); making him lose his erection; forcing him to urinate.

34 *i'the very throat*: utterly.

requited him: paid him back.

36 *took up my legs*: made me fall down.

shift: stratagem.

37 *cast him*: throw him to the ground, vomit him up.

37s.d. *Enter Macbeth*: The Porter's comedy has given the actor time to wash his hands and change costume.

38 *stirring*: awake.

42 *timely*: early.

43 *slipp'd the hour*: missed the time.

46 *limited*: appointed.

52 *prophesying*: people have been prophesying.

53–4 *dire … time*: terrible confusion and strange new happenings that have come out of this dreadful time; Lennox refers to the war with Norway—but his words have a more immediate application.

54 *The obscure bird*: the owl, which is usually seen and heard only at night.

55 *the livelong night*: throughout the whole long night.

57–8 *My … to it*: I can't remember a night like this in all my young life.

62 *Confusion*: chaos.

63 *sacrilegious*: unholy.

ope: open.

64 *The … temple*: The king's body (which had been anointed with holy oil at his coronation, to signify that he was God's deputy on earth).

69 *a new Gorgon*: In Greek mythology the Gorgon Medusa, a monster with snakes for hair, turned every man to stone who looked on her; the sight of Duncan's murdered body will have the same effect.

73–4 *Shake … itself*: Macduff calls everybody to wake from sleep, which is only an imitation ('counterfeit') of death, to look on the real thing.

73 *downy*: soft, comfortable (because their pillows would be stuffed with 'down' = a bird's soft under-feathers).

74–5 *see … image*: see a sight like a picture of the Last Judgement (the 'great doom').

76 *As … sprites*: rise up like ghosts from their graves (and as the Christian dead will do at the Last Judgement).

77 *countenance*: come face to face with.

78 *trumpet*: alarum bell (perhaps sounding like the 'last trumpet' which will arouse the dead on Judgement Day—1 Corinthians 15:52).

parley: conference.

81–2 *The … fell*: to repeat this matter to a woman would kill her as the words fell from my mouth.

87 *before this chance*: before this happened.

88 *blessed*: blessèd.

89 *nothing … mortality*: nothing important in life.

90 *toys*: trivialities, rubbish.

91–2 *The wine … of*: Macbeth compares the earth to a wine-cellar ('vault') from which the best wine has been 'drawn' (= drained from the cask), so that now it can boast ('brag') only of the dregs ('lees').

98 *badg'd*: wearing the badges of their profession (as murderers).

100 *distracted*: confused.

103 *Wherefore*: why.

104 *temp'rate*: temperate, restrained.

106–7 *Th'expedition … reason*: in my passionate love, I didn't stop to think.

107 *pauser*: that which should make me hesitate.

108 *His … blood*: Macbeth's imagery seems to cover Duncan with a rich garment.

109–10 *his … entrance*: Duncan's wounds were like a break in the shoreline where the sea's destruction has broken in.

110–11 *the murderers … trade*: the murderers wearing the coloured uniforms of their trade: Macbeth develops the image that Lennox began in line 98.

111 *Steep'd*: dyed.

112 *Unmannerly breech'd*: improperly dressed, wearing indecent clothing.

gore: blood.

refrain: stop himself from acting.

114 *make's*: make his.

116–17 *that … ours*: when the matter concerns us more than anyone else.

117–19 *What … us*: what can we say here, where our own fate may be secretly hiding, ready to rush out and seize upon us.

118 *auger hole*: hole made with a sharp-pointed tool.

119 *brew'd*: ready to be poured out (i.e. like ale).

120 *upon … motion*: ready to move, ready to express itself.

122 *naked frailties*: bare bodies.

126 *In … God*: under God's great protection.

127 *undivulg'd pretence*: unrevealed claim (to the crown).

129 *manly readiness*: everyday garments (instead of the 'night-gown' advised by Lady Macbeth in *2*, 2, 73).

131 *consort*: associate.

132–3 *To show … easy*: a hypocrite can easily show a sorrow that he doesn't feel.

134–5 *Our separated … safer*: we'll both be safer if we keep apart.

136–7 *the nea'er … bloody*: the more closely related (to Duncan), the more likely to be killed.

138 *lighted*: landed, found its target.

140 *be … leave-taking*: make a fuss about saying a formal goodbye.

141 *shift*: get away quietly.

141a–2 *there's … left*: it's an authorized theft, to steal (oneself) away from a place where

there is no mercy: Malcolm closes the scene with a rhyme and a grim pun.

SCENE 4

Somewhere in Scotland: *enter* Ross, *with an* Old Man[1]

Old Man

Threescore and ten I can remember well;
Within the volume of which time, I have seen
Hours dreadful and things strange, but this sore[3] night
Hath trifled former knowings[4].

Ross

Ha, good father[4a],
Thou seest the heavens[5], as troubled with man's act[5a],
Threatens his [6a]bloody stage[6]. By th'clock 'tis day
And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp[7].
Is't night's predominance[8], or the day's shame,
That darkness does the face of earth entomb[9]
When living light should kiss it?

Old Man

'Tis unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,
A falcon tow'ring in her pride of place[12]
Was by a mousing[13] owl hawk'd at[13a] and kill'd.

Ross

And Duncan's horses, a thing most strange and certain,
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race[15],
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls[16], flung out,
Contending 'gainst obedience[17] as they would
Make war with mankind.

Old Man

'Tis said, they eat[18] each other.

Ross

They[19] did so, to th'amazement of mine eyes
That looked upon't[20].

Enter Macduff

Here comes the good Macduff.
How goes the world, sir, now?

Macduff

Why, see you not?

Ross

Is't known who did this more than bloody deed?

Macduff

Those that Macbeth hath slain.

Ross

Alas the day,
What good could they pretend[24]?

Macduff

They were suborn'd[24a].
Malcolm and Donaldbain, the king's two sons,
Are stol'n away and fled, which puts upon them
Suspicion of the deed.

Ross

'Gainst nature still[27].

Thriftless[28] ambition that will ravin up[28a]
Thine own life's means[29]. Then 'tis most like
The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth.

Macduff

He is already nam'd[31] and gone to Scone[31a]
To be invested[32].

Ross

Where is Duncan's body?

Macduff

Carried to Colmkill[33],
The sacred storehouse of his predecessors
And guardian of their bones.

Ross

Will you to Scone?

Macduff

No, cousin, I'll to Fife[36].

Ross

Well, I will thither[36a].

Macduff

Well may you see things well done there. Adieu,
Lest our old robes sit easier than our new.

Ross

Farewell, father.

Old Man

God's benison[40] go with you, and with those
That would make good of bad, and friends of foes.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 2 Scene 4

Ross and an Old Man discuss the unnatural events that occurred on the night of Duncan's murder. They learn from Macduff that the king's two sons have fled, and that Macbeth has been chosen to be the next king.

1 *Old Man*: This unnamed character speaks for the common man who is affected by the situation but not involved in the action.

3 *sore*: severe, harsh.

4 *trifled former knowings*: made the things I knew before seem trivial.
father: A title of respect.

5–6 *the heavens … stage*: In Shakespeare's day it was generally believed that events in the greater world of nature (the 'macrocosm') reflected, or were affected by, events in the little world of man (the 'microcosm').

5 *act*: deed; performance.

6 *his bloody stage*: the scene of his bloodthirsty performance.

7 *travelling lamp*: the sun.

8 *predominance*: superior influence.

9 *entomb*: bury.

12 *pride of place*: the highest point of flight.

13 *mousing*: mouse-hunting.
hawk'd at: snatched up on the wing (as a hawk takes its prey).

15 *minions of their race*: best of their breed.

16 *broke their stalls*: broke out of their stables.

17 *Contending 'gainst obedience*: rebelling against the training that had made them obedient.

18 *eat*: ate.

19–20 *They … upon't*: Ross confirms the rumour with the evidence of his own eyes.

24 *What … pretend*: what good did they think it would do for them.

suborn'd: bribed.

27 *'Gainst nature still*: like all those other unnatural happenings.

28 *Thriftless*: wasteful.

ravin up: devour.

29 *Thine … means*: that which was necessary to give you life.

31 *nam'd*: chosen.

Scone: Once the capital of Scotland, and the traditional site of Scottish coronations.

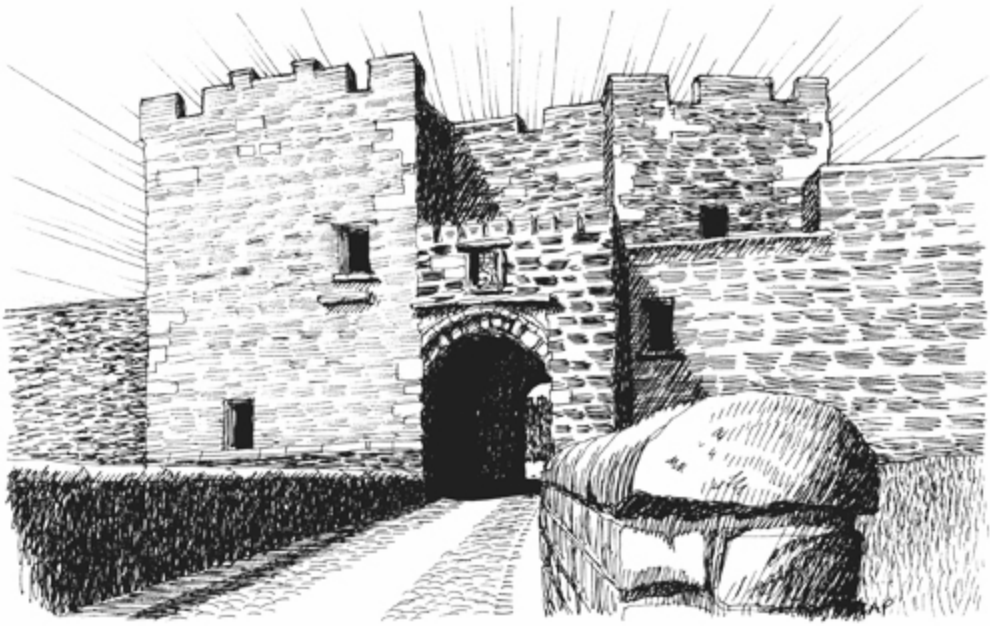
32 *invested*: installed ceremonially.

33 *Colmkill*: the island of Iona.

36 *Fife*: Macduff's ancestral home.

will thither: will go there.

40 *benison*: blessing.



Act 3

Scene 1

Macbeth*'s castle*: *enter* Banquo *dressed for riding*

Banquo

Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weïrd[2] women promis'd, and I fear
Thou played'st most foully for't; yet it was said
It should not stand in thy posterity[4],
But that myself should be the root and father[5]
Of many kings[6]. If there come truth from them—
As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine[7]—
Why by the verities on thee made good[8],
May they not be my oracles as well
And set me up in hope? But hush, no more.

Sennet[10] *sounded. Enter* Macbeth *as King*, Lady Macbeth *as Queen*, Lennox, Ross, Lords, *and* Attendants

Macbeth

Here's our chief guest.

Lady Macbeth

If he had been forgotten,
It had been as a gap in our great feast
And all thing unbecoming[13].

Macbeth

Tonight we hold a solemn supper[14], sir,
And I'll request your presence.

Banquo

Let your highness
Command upon me, to the which[16] my duties
Are with[17] a most indissoluble tie
Forever knit[18].

Macbeth

Ride you this afternoon[19]?

Banquo

Ay, my good lord.

Macbeth

We should have else desir'd your good advice
Which still[22] hath been both grave and prosperous[22a]
In this day's council[23]: but we'll take tomorrow.
Is't far you ride?

Banquo

As far, my lord, as will fill up the time
'Twixt this and supper. Go not[26] my horse the better,
I must become a borrower of the night
For a dark hour, or twain[28].

Macbeth

Fail not our feast.

Banquo

My lord, I will not.

Macbeth

We hear our bloody[31] cousins are bestow'd[31a]
In England and in Ireland, not confessing
Their cruel parricide[33], filling their hearers
With strange invention[34]. But of that[34a] tomorrow,
When therewithal we shall have cause of state
Craving us jointly[36]. Hie you to horse; adieu,
Till you return at night. Goes Fleance with you?

Banquo

Ay, my good lord; our time does call upon's[38].

Macbeth

I wish your horses swift and sure of foot,
And so I do commend you to their backs.
Farewell.

[*Exit* Banquo

Let every man be master of his time[42]
Till seven at night; to make society
The sweeter welcome, we will keep ourself
Till supper-time alone. While then, God be with you.

[*Exeunt all but* Macbeth *and a* Servant

Sirrah[46], a word with you: attend those men
Our pleasure?

Servant

They are, my lord, without[48] the palace gate.

Macbeth

Bring them before us.

[*Exit* Servant

To be[49] thus is nothing,
But to be safely thus[50]. Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep[51], and in his[51a] royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be fear'd[52]. 'Tis much he dares,
And to that dauntless temper[53] of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none but he,
Whose being I do fear; and under[56] him
My genius is rebuk'd, as it is said
Mark Antony's was by Caesar[58]. He chid[58a] the sisters
When first they put the name of king upon me
And bade them speak to him. Then prophet-like,
They hail'd him father to a line of kings.
Upon[62] my head they plac'd a fruitless crown
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe[63],
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal[64] hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
For Banquo's issue[66] have I fil'd[66a] my mind;
For them, the gracious Duncan have I murder'd,
Put rancours[68] in the vessel[68a] of my peace
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel[69]
Given to the common enemy of man[70],
To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings.
Rather than so, come Fate into the list[72],
And champion me to th'utterance[73]. Who's there?

Enter Servant *and two* Murderers

[*To* Servant] Now go to the door and stay there till we call.

[*Exit* Servant

Was it not yesterday we spoke together?

Murderers

It was, so please your highness.

Macbeth

Well then[77], now have you considered of my speeches? Know, that it was he[78] in the times past which held you so under fortune[79], which you thought had been our innocent self. This I made good[80] to you in our last conference; passed in probation[81] with you how you were borne in hand[82], how crossed[82a]; the instruments[82b], who wrought[83] with them, and all things else that might to half a soul[84] and to a notion[84a] crazed say, 'Thus did Banquo.'

First Murderer

You made it known to us.

Macbeth

I did so, and went further, which is now our point of second meeting. Do you find your patience so predominant in your nature, that you can let this go? Are you so gospelled[90], to pray for this good man and for his issue, whose heavy hand hath bowed you to the grave and beggared yours forever[92]?

First Murderer

We are men, my liege.

Macbeth

Ay, in the catalogue[94] ye go for men,
As hounds, and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
Shoughs[96], water-rugs[96a], and demi-wolves[96b] are clept[96c]
All by the name of dogs. The valu'd file
Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,
The housekeeper[99], the hunter, every one
According to the gift which bounteous nature
Hath in him clos'd, whereby he does receive
Particular addition from the bill
That writes them all alike. And so of men[103].
Now, if you have a station[104] in the file

Not i'th'worst rank of manhood, say't,
And I will[106] put that business in your bosoms,
Whose execution takes your enemy off[107],
Grapples you to the heart and love of us[108]
Who[109] wear[109a] our health but sickly in his life,
Which in his death were perfect[110].

Second Murderer

I am one, my liege,
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Hath so incens'd that I am reckless what I do
To spite the world.

First Murderer

And I another,
So weary with disasters, tugg'd with fortune,
That I would set my life on any chance[115]
To mend it or be rid on't.

Macbeth

Both of you know
Banquo was your enemy.

Murderers

True, my lord.

Macbeth

So is he mine, and in such bloody distance[118]
That every minute of his being thrusts[119]
Against my near'st of life[120]; and though[120a] I could
With barefac'd power sweep him from my sight
And bid my will avouch[122] it, yet I must not,
For[123] certain friends that are both his and mine,
Whose loves I may not drop, but wail[124] his fall
Who I myself struck down. And thence it is
That I to your assistance do make love,
Masking the business from the common eye
For sundry weighty reasons.

Second Murderer

We shall, my lord,

Perform what you command us.

First Murderer

Though our lives—

Macbeth

Your spirits shine through you. Within this hour at most,
I will advise you where to plant yourselves,
Acquaint you with the perfect spy o'th'time[132],
The moment on't, for't must be done tonight,
And something[134] from the palace: always thought[134a],
That I require a clearness[135]. And with him,
To leave no rubs[136] nor botches[136a] in the work,
Fleance, his son that keeps him company,
Whose absence is no less material to me[138]
Than is his father's, must embrace the fate
Of that dark hour. Resolve yourselves apart[140],
I'll come to you anon.

Murderers

We are resolv'd, my lord.

Macbeth

I'll call upon you straight[142]; abide within.

[*Exeunt* Murderers

It is concluded. Banquo, thy soul's flight,
If it find heaven, must find it out tonight.

[*Exit*

Notes

Act 3 Scene 1

Banquo is suspicious—and Macbeth arranges to have him murdered.

2 *weïrd*: mystic, supernatural.

4 *stand … posterity*: be inherited by your descendants.

5–6 *father … kings*: According to popular legend, King James was one of Banquo's descendants.

7 *shine*: look favourably.

8 *verities … good*: prophecies that have come true in your case.

10s.d. *Sennet*: A distinctive set of musical notes played on trumpet to herald a specific individual, (like a modern signature tune).

13 *all thing unbecoming*: quite improper.

14 *solemn supper*: formal dinner.

16 *to the which*: to which command.

17–18 *with … knit*: bound with a tie that cannot be broken.

19 *Ride … afternoon*: Macbeth is beginning to lay his plans.

22 *still*: always.

grave and prosperous: serious and profitable.

23 *council*: i.e. meeting of the Privy Council.

26–8 *Go not … twain*: if my horse won't go any faster, I shall have to take up one or two ('twain') hours of darkness.

31 *bloody*: stained with the blood of Duncan.

are bestow'd: have taken refuge.

33 *parricide*: murder of their father.

34 *invention*: tales they have invented.

34–6 *of that … jointly*: we will talk about that tomorrow, when there will also be affairs of state that demand our joint attention.

38 *our time … upon's*: we're in rather a hurry.

42 *master of his time*: be free to do as he wants.

46 *Sirrah*: A condescending form of address to a social inferior.

48 *without*: outside.

49–50 *To be … thus*: it is nothing to be king as I am now—I must be king in safety.

51 *stick deep*: are deeply rooted.

51–2 *in his … fear'd*: there's something overpowering in his natural nobility of character that I should be afraid of.

53 *to … temper*: in addition to that courageous spirit.

56–8 *under… Caesar*: Mark Antony was told by a soothsayer that his guiding spirit ('genius') was not powerful enough to oppose that of Octavius Caesar (see *Antony and Cleopatra*, *2*, 3, 20–3).

58 *chid*: chided, reproved.

62–3 *Upon … gripe*: put a crown on my head and a sceptre in my hand ('gripe' = grasp) that could not be passed on to my descendants.

64 *unlineal hand*: not in my line of descent, not descended from me.

66 *issue*: descendants.

fil'd: defiled.

68 *rancours*: bitter ill-feelings.

vessel: drinking-vessel, chalice.

69 *eternal jewel*: immortal soul.

70 *common … man*: i.e. the devil (who is the enemy of everybody).

72 *come … list*: let Fate come into combat like a medieval knight into the tournament.

73 *champion … utterance*: challenge me to deadly combat.

77–92 *Well then … forever*: Macbeth begins to speak in prose, to win the Murderers' confidence.

78 *he*: i.e. Banquo.

79 *under fortune*: below what you deserved.

80 *made good*: explained.

81 *passed in probation*: proved, demonstrated.

82 *borne in hand*: deceived, deliberately misled.

crossed: frustrated.

the instruments: the means that were used.

83 *wrought*: worked.

84 *soul*: mind.

notion: intellect.

90 *gospelled*: influenced by the teaching of the Christian Gospels ('Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you', Matthew 5:44).

94–103 *in the catalogue … men*: you are classified as ‘men’ in any general list of creatures, just as different breeds of dog are all included under ‘dogs’; but a more valuable listing is that which notes the precise qualities of the animals, according to their natural abilities; this list, where the dog receives individual description (‘Particular addition’), is distinct from the inventory (‘bill’) that counts them all alike. The same is true of men.

96 *Shoughs*: a kind of lap-dog.

water-rugs: probably a kind of long-haired retriever useful in water.

demi-wolves: cross-breeds, half wolf and half dog.

clept: called.

99 *housekeeper*: domestic guard dog.

104 *station*: position, rank.

106–7 *I will … off*: I will tell you secretly (‘in your bosoms’) of a plan which, when it is carried out, removes your enemy.

108 *Grapples … us*: fastens you firmly to my affections (as grappling-irons hold fighting ships together in battle).

109–10 *Who … perfect*: Macbeth will feel ill as long as Banquo is alive, but he would be perfectly healthy if Banquo were dead.

109 *wear*: Macbeth continues to use clothing metaphors.

115 *set … chance*: gamble my life on anything.

118 *distance*: dissension.

119 *thrusts*: i.e. like a fencer’s sword.

120 *near’st of life*: very existence, vital organs.

120–2 *though … avouch it*: although I have the power to kill him without giving any excuse, and say I did it just because I wanted to.

123 *For*: for the sake of.

124 *but wail*: but I must lament.

132 *perfect spy o’th’time*: best time I can see for the murder.

134 *something*: some distance.

thought: remembered.

135 *a clearness*: to be kept in the clear, to be free from all suspicion.

136 *rubs*: mistakes, impediments.

botches: bungling.

138 *Whose … to me*: whose death is just as important to me.

140 *Resolve … apart*: make up your minds about it (i.e. the additional murder of Fleance) in private.

142 *straight*: immediately.

SCENE 2

Macbeth*'s castle*: *enter* Lady Macbeth, *and a* Servant

Lady Macbeth
Is Banquo gone from court?
Servant
Ay, madam, but returns again tonight.
Lady Macbeth
Say to the king, I would[3] attend his leisure
For a few words[4].
Servant
Madam, I will.

[*Exit*

Lady Macbeth

Nought's had[4a], all's spent
Where our desire is got without content[5].
'Tis safer[6] to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy[7].

Enter Macbeth

How now, my lord, why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
Using[10] those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on[11]? Things without all remedy
Should be without regard; what's done, is done.
Macbeth
We have[13] scorch'd[13a] the snake[13b], not kill'd it;
She'll close[14], and be herself[14a], whilst our poor malice
Remains in danger of her former [15]tooth[15a].
But let the frame of things[16] disjoint, both the worlds[16a] suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,

Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave.
After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst; nor steel nor poison,
Malice domestic[25], foreign levy[25a], nothing
Can touch him further.

Lady Macbeth

Come on. Gentle my lord[27],
Sleek o'er[28] your rugged looks, be bright and jovial
Among your guests tonight.

Macbeth

So shall I, love,
And so I pray be you. Let your remembrance[30]
Apply to Banquo, present him eminence[31]
Both with eye and tongue; unsafe[32] the while, that we
Must lave our honours in these flattering streams[33]
And make our faces vizards[34] to our hearts,
Disguising what they are.

Lady Macbeth

You must leave this.

Macbeth

O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!
Thou know'st that Banquo and his Fleance lives.

Lady Macbeth

But in them[38] Nature's copy's not eterne[38a].

Macbeth

There's comfort yet, they are assailable[39];
Then be thou jocund[40]: ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight[41], ere[41a] to black Hecate's[41b] summons
The shard-born[42] beetle with his drowsy hums
Hath rung night's yawning peal[43], there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note.

Lady Macbeth

What's to be done?

Macbeth

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck[45],
Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling[46] night,
Scarf up[47] the tender eye of pitiful day
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond[49]
Which keeps me pale[50]. Light thickens[50a],
And the crow makes wing to th'rooky[51] wood;
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse[53].
Thou marvell'st at my words, but hold thee still[54];
Things bad begun, make strong themselves by ill[55].
So prithee, go with me.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 3 Scene 2

Lady Macbeth is also uneasy; Macbeth assures her that he will take some action—but he refuses to tell her more.

3–4 *I would … words*: I would like to have a few words with him when he has time.

4–5 *Nought's had … content*: we have gained nothing and lost everything when we are not satisfied with what we have got.

6–7 *'Tis safer … joy*: it is better to be the one who is killed than to live in such insecurity because we have killed him.

10–11 *Using … on*: living with those thoughts that should have died when the subject of them (i.e. Duncan) was killed.

13–15 *We have … tooth*: In killing Duncan, Macbeth has only been partially successful: the royal dynasty, like a wounded snake, will recover, and Macbeth's feeble violence ('poor malice') will be again in danger of reprisals from its power. Macbeth may be speaking here as a king (using the 'royal plural'), or as a husband (including Lady Macbeth in the action).

13 *scorch'd*: notched, scored.

13–14 *snake … herself*: Although the 'snake' represents Duncan and his male heirs, Macbeth still thinks of it as female.

14 *close*: rejoin, heal up.

15 *tooth*: power.

16 *frame of things*: structure of the entire universe.
both the worlds: earth and heaven.
25 *domestic*: at home, in Scotland.
foreign levy: armies gathered (levied) abroad.
27 *Gentle my lord*: my gentle lord.
28 *sleek o'er*: smooth down.
30 *remembrance*: regard, thought.
31 *present him eminence*: treat him with the highest respect.
32–3 *unsafe … streams*: in this insecure time we must wash ('lave') our royal titles in floods of flattery (to make them appear honourable).

34 *vizards*: masks; the part of helmet that covers the face.
38 *in them … eterne*: they are not immortal; Nature (or Life) does not hold an eternal copyright on Banquo and Fleance.
eterne: eternal.
39 *are assailable*: can be assaulted, attacked.
40 *jocund*: merry.
41 *cloister'd flight*: flight around the cloisters (= covered walks with open sides).
41–3 *ere … peal*: before the dung-beetle responds to the call of darkness, humming like an evening curfew-bell to call yawning people to sleep.
black Hecate: goddess of witchcraft.
42 *shard-born*: born in dung; an alternative spelling '*borne*' permits a different meaning —'carried aloft by its wing-cases'.
45 *chuck*: chick (a term of endearment still used in England in parts of the Midlands).

46 *seeling*: stitching up; in falconry this refers to the sewing together of a young bird's eyelids for the purpose of training.

47 *Scarf up*: blindfold (as with a scarf over the eyes).

49 *Cancel … bond*: put an end to the lives of Banquo and Fleance; from a pun on 'seeling'/'sealing', Macbeth has led to the metaphor of a legal contract.

50 *keeps me pale*: restrains me; the 'pale' was the boundary dividing one country's territory from the next.

Light thickens: it's getting dark.

51 *rooky*: filled with rooks; crows and rooks, both black birds, are almost identical.

53 *night's black … rouse*: wicked creatures that work by night are waking up to hunt their prey.

54 *hold thee still*: carry on as you have been doing.

55 *Things … ill*: deeds that begin with evil grow stronger with more evil.

SCENE 3

Some distance from Macbeth*'s castle*: *enter three* Murderers

First Murderer
But who did bid thee join with us?
Third Murderer[1]
Macbeth.
Second Murderer
He needs not our mistrust[2], since he delivers
Our offices[3] and what we have to do
To the direction just[4].
First Murderer
[*To* Third Murderer] Then stand with us.
The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day;
Now spurs the lated[6] traveller apace
To gain the timely inn[7], and near approaches
The subject of our watch.
Third Murderer
Hark, I hear horses.
Banquo
[*Within*] Give us a light there, ho!
Second Murderer
Then 'tis he; the rest[9]
That are within the note of expectation[10]
Already are i'th'court.
First Murderer
His horses go about[11].
Third Murderer
Almost a mile; but he does usually,
So all men do, from hence to th'palace gate
Make it their walk[14].

Enter Banquo *and* Fleance, *with a torch*

Second Murderer

A light, a light!

Third Murderer

’Tis he.

First Murderer

Stand to’t.

Banquo

It will be rain tonight.

First Murderer

Let it come down.

The Murderers *attack*. First Murderer *strikes out the light*

Banquo

O, treachery!
Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!
Thou mayst revenge—O slave!

Dies. Fleance *escapes*

Third Murderer

Who did strike out the light?

First Murderer

Was’t not the way?

Third Murderer

There’s but one down; the son is fled.

Second Murderer

We have lost best half of our affair.

First Murderer

Well, let’s away, and say how much is done.

[*Exeunt, with* Banquo*’s body*

Notes

Act 3 Scene 3

Banquo is murdered—but Fleance escapes.

1 *Third Murderer*: Perhaps Macbeth cannot trust even the Murderers he has chosen.

2 *He … mistrust*: there's no need for him to mistrust us.

3 *offices*: duties; see '*Macbeth*: the source', here.

4 *just*: exactly.

6 *lated*: belated.

7 *To … inn*: to get to the inn in time (before dark).

9–10 *the rest … expectation*: the other expected guests.

11 *go about*: are going a long way round.

14 *Make … walk*: After a long journey the horses would be sweating, and it would be necessary for grooms to walk with them until they were cool.

SCENE 4

The Banqueting Hall. Banquet prepared[0]. *Two thrones are placed on stage. Enter* Macbeth *as King*, Lady Macbeth *as Queen*, Ross, Lennox, Lords, *and* Attendants. Lady Macbeth *sits*

Macbeth

You know your own degrees[1], sit down; at first and last[1a], the hearty welcome.

The Lords *sit*

Lords

Thanks to your majesty.

Macbeth

Our self will mingle with society and play the humble host; our hostess keeps her state[5], but in best time we will require her welcome.

Lady Macbeth

Pronounce it for me, sir, to all our friends, for my heart speaks they are welcome.

Enter First Murderer

Macbeth

See, they encounter[9] thee with their hearts' thanks.
Both sides are even[10]; here I'll sit i'th'midst.
Be large[11] in mirth, anon we'll drink[11a] a measure
The table round[12]. [*To* First Murderer] There's blood upon thy face.

First Murderer

'Tis Banquo's then.

Macbeth

'Tis better thee without, than he within.
Is he dispatch'd[15]?

First Murderer

My lord, his throat is cut; that I did for him.

Macbeth

Thou art the best o'th'cut-throats,
Yet he's good that did the like[18] for Fleance;
If thou didst it, thou are the nonpareil[19].

First Murderer

Most royal sir, Fleance is scap'd[20].

Macbeth

Then comes my fit[21] again: I had else been perfect[21a];
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock[22],
As broad and general as the casing air[23]:
But now I am cabin'd[24], cribb'd[24a], confin'd, bound in
To saucy[25] doubts and fears. But Banquo's safe?

First Murderer

Ay, my good lord: safe in a ditch he bides,
With twenty trenched[27] gashes on his head,
The least a death to nature[28].

Macbeth

Thanks for that.
There the grown serpent lies; the worm[29] that's fled
Hath nature[30] that in time will venom breed,
No teeth for th'present[31]. Get thee gone; tomorrow
We'll hear ourselves again.

[*Exit* First Murderer

Lady Macbeth

My royal lord,
You do not give the cheer[33]; the feast[33a] is sold
That is not often vouch'd while 'tis a-making,
'Tis given with welcome[35]. To feed[35a] were best at home:
From thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony[36],
Meeting were bare without it[37].

Enter the Ghost of Banquo *and sits in* Macbeth*'s place*

Macbeth

Sweet remembrancer!
Now good digestion wait on appetite,

And health on both.

Lennox

May't please your highness, sit.

Macbeth

Here had we now our country's honour roof'd[40],
Were the grac'd person of our Banquo present,
Who may I rather challenge for unkindness[42]
Than pity for mischance[43].

Ross

His absence[43a], sir,
Lays blame upon his promise[44]. Please't[44a] your highness
To grace us with your royal company?

Macbeth

The table's full.

Lennox

Here is a place reserv'd, sir.

Macbeth

Where[47]?

Lennox

Here, my good lord. What is't that moves[48] your highness?

Macbeth

Which of you have done this?

Lords

What, my good lord?

Macbeth

Thou canst not say I did it; never shake
Thy gory locks at me!

'Never shake Thy gory locks at me!' (*3*, 4, 50–1) Bob Peck as Macbeth, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1982.

Ross

Gentlemen, rise, his highness is not well.

Lady Macbeth *joins the* Lords

Lady Macbeth

Sit, worthy friends. My lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat.
The fit is momentary; upon a thought[55]
He will again be well. If much you note[56] him
You shall offend him and extend his passion.
Feed, and regard him not. [*To* Macbeth] Are you a man?

Macbeth

Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appal the devil.

Lady Macbeth

O proper stuff[60]!
This is the very painting[61] of your fear;
This is the air-drawn[62] dagger which you said
Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws[63] and starts[63a],
Impostors to[64] true fear, would well become
A woman's[65] story at a winter's fire
Authoriz'd by her [66a]grandam[66]. Shame itself!
Why do you make such faces? When all's done
You look but on a stool[68].

Macbeth

Prithee, see there! Behold, look, lo! How say you?
[*To* Ghost] Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.
If[71] charnel-houses[71a] and our graves must send
Those that we bury back[73], our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites.

[*Exit* Ghost of Banquo

Lady Macbeth

What, quite unmann'd[73a] in folly?

Macbeth

If I stand here, I saw him.

Lady Macbeth

Fie, for shame.

Macbeth

Blood[75] hath been shed ere now, i'th'olden time,
Ere humane statute purg'd the gentle weal[76];
Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd
Too terrible for the ear[78]. The time has been
That when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end. But now they rise again
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns[81]
And push us from our stools. This is more strange
Than such a murder is.

Lady Macbeth

My worthy lord,
Your noble friends do lack you.

Macbeth

I do forget—
Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends.
I have a strange infirmity which is nothing
To those that know me. Come, love and health to all[87],
Then I'll sit down. Give me some wine; fill full!

Enter Ghost of Banquo

I drink to th'general joy o'th'whole table,

And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss.
Would he were here! To all, and him we thirst,
And all to all.

Lords

Our duties and the pledge[92].

Macbeth

Avaunt and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!
Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation[95] in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with.

Lady Macbeth

Think of this, good peers,
But as a thing of custom[97]. 'Tis no other,
Only it spoils the pleasure of the time.

Macbeth

What man dare, I dare;
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The arm'd[101] rhinoceros, or th'Hyrcan tiger[101a],
Take any shape but that[102], and my firm nerves
Shall never tremble. Or be alive again,
And dare me to the desert[104] with thy sword;
If trembling I inhabit then[105], protest[105a] me
The baby[106] of a girl. Hence horrible shadow,
Unreal mock'ry hence.

[*Exit* Ghost of Banquo

Why so, being gone,
I am a man again.—Pray you, sit still.

Lady Macbeth

You have displac'd the mirth, broke the good meeting
With most admir'd[110] disorder.

Macbeth

Can such things be,
And overcome[111] us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder? You make[112] me strange
Even to the disposition that I [113a]owe[113],

When now I think you can behold such sights
And keep the natural ruby[115] of your cheeks,
When mine is blanch'd[116] with fear.

Ross

What sights, my lord?

Lady Macbeth

I pray you speak not; he grows worse and worse.
Question enrages him. At once, good night.
Stand not upon the order of your going[119],
But go at once.

Lennox

Good night, and better health
Attend his majesty.

Lady Macbeth

A kind good night to all.

[*Exeunt* Lords *and* Attendants

Macbeth

It will have blood they say: blood will have blood.
Stones have been known to move and trees to speak.
Augures[124], and understood relations[124a], have
By maggot-pies[125], and choughs[125a], and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood[126]. What is the night?

Lady Macbeth

Almost at odds[127] with morning, which is which.

Macbeth

How sayst thou that Macduff denies his person[128]
At our great bidding?

Lady Macbeth

Did you send to him, sir?

Macbeth

I hear it by the way, but I will send.
There's not a one of them[131] but in his house
I keep a servant feed[132]. I will tomorrow—
And betimes[133] I will—to the weïrd sisters.
More shall they speak. For now I am bent[134] to know

By the worst means, the worst; for mine own good,
All causes shall give way. I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious[138] as go o'er[138a].
Strange things I have in head that will to hand[139],
Which must be acted ere they may be scann'd[140].

Lady Macbeth

You lack the season[141] of all natures, sleep.

Macbeth

Come, we'll to sleep. My strange and self-abuse[142]
Is the initiate fear[143] that wants[143a] hard use;
We are yet but young[144] in deed[144a].

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 3 Scene 4

Macbeth and his wife welcome the guests to their state banquet. The Ghost of Banquo appears but only Macbeth can see it, and his strange behaviour startles his wife and their guests.

0s.d. *Banquet prepared*: This might be an elaborate arrangement of fruit and sweets with wine, or else a full state dinner.

1 *degrees*: social ranks (which would determine the seating-order).
at first and last: to one and all.

5 *keeps her state*: remains seated on the throne of state.

9 *encounter*: respond to.

10 *Both … even*: there are equal numbers of people on both sides of the table.

11 *large*: unrestrained.

11–12 *drink … round*: drink a toast with each person around the table.

15 *dispatch'd*: dealt with—i.e. killed.

18 *the like*: the same.

19 *the nonpareil*: the best, without equal.

20 *scap'd*: escaped.

21 *fit*: spasm of fear.
perfect: completely safe.

22 *Whole … rock*: solid as marble, firm as a rock.

23 *broad … air*: free and unconfined as the air surrounding us.

24 *cabin'd*: cramped into a small space.
cribb'd: shut up in a stall.

25 *saucy*: intrusive, distracting.

27 *trenched*: trenchèd; hacked out.

28 *The least … nature*: even the smallest would kill a man.

29 *worm*: grub.

30–1 *nature … present*: will become poisonous in the natural course of things, but is harmless at present.

33 *give the cheer*: entertain your guests.

33–5 *the feast … welcome*: a banquet is no better than a meal that has to be paid for unless, during the feasting (‘while ’tis a-making’), the guests are often told how welcome they are.

35–6 *to feed … ceremony*: it’s better to eat at home, but the social rituals of a formal occasion add an extra sauce to a meal eaten away from home.

37 *Meeting … it*: a gathering of people needs these social rituals of courtesy.

40 *our … roof’d*: the nobility of our country complete (as a house is completed when the roof is put on).

42 *challenge for unkindness*: rebuke for lack of courtesy.

43 *pity for mischance*: be sorry for any accident that has happened to him.

43–4 *His absence … promise*: if he can’t be here, he should not have promised to come.

44a *Please’t*: may it please.

47 *Where?*: Only Macbeth can see the Ghost.

48 *moves*: distresses.

55 *upon a thought*: as fast as you can think it.

56 *note*: take notice of.

60 *proper stuff*: absolute rubbish.

61 *painting*: image, imagination.

62 *air-drawn*: drawn in the air.

63 *flaws*: bursts of passion.
starts: startled movements.

64 *Impostors to*: false imitations of.

65–6 *A woman’s … grandam*: an old wife’s tale for a winter evening round the fireside.

66 *grandam*: grandmother.

68 *stool*: The usual seating for Elizabethans; chairs were expensive and rare.

71–3 *If … back*: if vaults and graves can send back the bodies we have interred in them, our only burying-places will be the stomachs (‘maws’) of carrion-eating birds.

71 *charnel-house*: vaults for the storage of the bones of the dead.

73a *unmann’d*: Lady Macbeth challenges her husband’s manhood; compare *1*, 7, 39–54.

75–6 *Blood … gentle weal*: there was bloodshed before now, in the olden days, before law and order (‘humane statute’) had regulated the nation.

78 *for the ear*: to speak about.

81 *twenty … crowns*: twenty fatal wounds in their heads; compare ‘twenty trenched gashes on his head’ (line 27).

87 *love … all*: Macbeth proposes a toast to ease the tension.

92 *pledge*: oath of allegiance.

95 *speculation*: power of seeing.

97 *a thing of custom*: a regular occurrence.

101 *arm'd*: i.e. with a thick skin and a tusk.

Hyrcan tiger: The tigers of Hyrcania (an area on the south-east coast of the Caspian Sea) were proverbially (and poetically) fierce.

102 *but that*: i.e. except that of Banquo's ghost.

104 *dare … desert*: challenge me to fight you in the wilderness.

105 *If trembling … then*: if I so much as tremble then.

protest: proclaim.

106 *baby*: doll, plaything.

110 *admir'd*: amazing, astonishing.

111 *overcome*: pass over.

112–13 *make … owe*: make me feel as though I'm not really myself.

113 *owe*: own.

115 *ruby*: redness.

116 *blanch'd*: turned white.

119 *Stand … going*: don't worry about the precedence of rank in your departure. Compare this disarray with the order of 'You know your own degrees' (line 1).

124–6 *Augures … blood*: speaking birds (such as magpies, jackdaws, and rooks) have given omens ('Augures') and signs have revealed the most hidden ('secret'st') murderer by means of talking birds.

124a *understood relations*: known relationships (e.g. between natural phenomena and events in the human world).

125 *maggot-pies*: magpies (which can imitate the human voice).

choughs: crows (birds of ill omen).

127 *at odds*: disputing with.

128 *denies his person*: refuses to come; Macduff's refusal is an insult, and an act of defiance.

131 *them*: the Scottish nobles.

132 *feed*: bribed—i.e. as a spy.

133 *betimes*: early, speedily.

134 *bent*: determined.

138 *tedious*: troublesome.

go o'er: crossing to the other side.

139 *will to hand*: need to be done.

140 *scann'd*: looked at closely.

141 *season*: preservative.

142 *My … self-abuse*: my uncharacteristic behaviour.

143 *the initiate fear*: a novice's fear.

wants: lacks.

144 *young*: inexperienced.

deed: action.

SCENE 5

A deserted place. *Thunder*. *Enter the three* Witches, *meeting* Hecate

First Witch

Why how now, Hecate, you look angerly?

Hecate

Have I not reason, beldams[2], as you are,
Saucy[3] and over-bold? How did you dare
To trade and traffic[4] with Macbeth
In riddles and affairs of death?
And I the mistress of your charms,
The close contriver[7] of all harms,
Was never call'd to bear my part
Or show the glory of our art[9]?
And which is worse, all you have done
Hath been but for a wayward son,
Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you[13].
But make amends now. Get you gone,
And at the pit of Acheron[15]
Meet me i'th'morning. Thither he
Will come to know his destiny.
Your vessels and your spells provide,
Your charms and every thing beside.
I am for th'air. This night I'll spend
Unto a dismal and a fatal end.
Great business must be wrought ere noon.
Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vap'rous drop[24] profound[24a];
I'll catch it ere it come to ground;
And that distill'd by magic sleights[26],
Shall raise such artificial sprites[27]
As by the strength of their illusion
Shall draw him on to his confusion[29].

He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear.
And you all know, 32asecurity32
Is mortals' chiefest enemy33.

*Music, and a song*33a, *'Come away, come away'*, *within*

Hark, I am call'd: my little spirit, see,
Sits in a foggy cloud, and stays for me.

[*Exit*

First Witch

Come, let's make haste; she'll soon be back again.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 3 Scene 5

The witches and their queen Hecate prepare for another meeting with Macbeth. This scene is not Shakespeare's work; see 'Source, Date, and Text', here, and '*Macbeth*: the source', here.

2 *beldams*: old hags.
3 *Saucy*: impudent.
4 *traffic*: deal.
7 *close contriver*: secret organizer.
9 *art*: witchcraft.
13 *Loves … you*: only cares about magic and prophecy for what they can do for him, and not for themselves.
15 *Acheron*: This was one of the rivers of Hades, the underworld of classical mythology.
24 *vap'rous drop*: It was believed that witches could invoke the moon to shed a malign influence on herbs and other objects.
profound: deep, with hidden qualities.
26 *sleights*: tricks, artifice.
27 *artificial sprites*: wicked spirits made by art (i.e. not the real demonic powers).
29 *confusion*: ruin, damnation.
32–3 *security … enemy*: Proverbial: 'the way to be safe is never to be secure'.
32 *security*: over-confidence, complacency.
33s.d. *Music … song*: The song may have been that in the play *The Witch* by Thomas Middleton (see '*Macbeth*: the source', here).

SCENE 6

Somewhere in Scotland: *enter* Lennox *and another* Lord

Lennox

My former speeches have but hit[1] your thoughts
Which can interpret further; only I say
Things have been strangely borne[3]. The gracious Duncan
Was pitied of[4] Macbeth; marry[4a], he was dead.
And the right-valiant Banquo walk'd too late,
Whom you may say, if't please you, Fleance kill'd,
For Fleance fled. Men must not walk too late.
Who cannot want the thought[8] how monstrous
It was for Malcolm and for Donaldbain
To kill their gracious father? Damned[10] fact[10a],
How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight[11]
In pious[12] rage the two delinquents tear,
That were the slaves of drink and thralls[13] of sleep?
Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too,
For 'twould have anger'd any heart alive
To hear the men deny't[16]. So that I say,
He[17] has borne all things well, and I do think
That had he Duncan's sons under his key[18]—
As, an't please[19] heaven, he shall not—they should find
What 'twere to kill a father. So should Fleance.
But peace, for from broad words[21], and 'cause he[21a] fail'd
His presence at the tyrant's feast[22], I hear
Macduff lives in disgrace. Sir, can you tell
Where he bestows himself?[24]

Lord

The son of Duncan[24a],
From whom this tyrant holds[25] the due of birth[25a],
Lives in the English court and is receiv'd
Of[27] the most pious Edward[27a] with such grace,
That[28] the malevolence of fortune nothing

Takes from his high respect[29]. Thither Macduff
Is gone to pray the holy king upon his aid[30]
To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward[31],
That by the help of these, with him above[32]
To ratify[33] the work, we may again
Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,
Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,
Do faithful[36] homage and receive free honours[36a],
All which we pine for now. And this report
Hath so exasperate[38] their king that he
Prepares for some attempt of war.

Lennox

Sent he[40] to Macduff?

Lord

He did. And with an absolute, 'Sir, not I',[41]
The cloudy[42] messenger turns me his back[42a]
And hums[43], as who should say, 'You'll rue the time
That clogs[44] me with this answer.'

Lennox

And that well might
Advise[45] him to a caution t'hold what distance
His wisdom can provide[46]. Some holy angel
Fly to the court of England and unfold
His message ere he come, that a swift blessing
May soon return to this our suffering country
Under a hand accurs'd.

Lord

I'll send my prayers with him.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 3 Scene 6

Lennox and an unnamed Lord discuss the state of affairs: Malcolm is in England; Macduff has gone to join him; and the English king is raising an army to fight against Macbeth.

1 *hit*: touched.

3 *borne*: managed, carried out.

4 *pitied of*: lamented by. Lennox is choosing his words very carefully.

Marry: by [the Virgin] Mary; a mild oath, meaning no more than 'yes, indeed'.

8 *cannot … thought*: can fail to think.

10 *Damned*: damnèd.

fact: deed.

11 *straight*: immediately.

12 *pious*: dutiful, loyal.

13 *thralls*: captives.

16 *deny't*: deny that they had murdered Duncan.

17 *He*: i.e. Macbeth.

18 *under his key*: locked up in his power.

19 *an't please*: if it please.

21 *broad words*: unguarded gossip.

21a–2 *he … feast*: failed to attend Macbeth's banquet; see *3*, 4, 128.

24 *bestows himself*: has hidden himself.

son of Duncan: Malcolm.

25 *holds*: withholds.

the due of birth: his birthright—i.e. the crown.

27 *Of*: by.

Edward: Edward the Confessor, King of England 1042–66.

28–9 *That … respect*: Malcolm's present misfortunes have not affected him in Edward's high esteem.

30 *upon his aid*: in support of Malcolm.

31 *Northumberland … Siward*: Siward, Earl of Northumberland, and Young Siward, his

son.

32 *him above*: God.

33 *ratify*: make valid, sanction.

36 *faithful*: sincere.

free honours: honest rewards.

38 *exasperate*: exasperated, infuriated.

40 *he*: i.e. Macbeth.

41 *'Sir, not I'*: This was Macduff's reply to Macbeth.

42 *cloudy*: frowning.

turns me his back: goes and turns his back; 'me' is used in this phrase merely for emphasis.

43 *hums*: murmurs.

44 *clogs*: burdens; the Messenger probably knows Macbeth's treatment of those who bring bad news.

45–6 *Advise … provide*: warn him to stay as far away (from Macbeth) as he knows how.

Act 4

SCENE 1

An isolated place. *Thunder*. *Enter the three* Witches *with a cauldron*

First Witch

Thrice the brindled cat[1] hath mew'd.

Second Witch

Thrice and once the hedge-pig[2] whin'd.

Third Witch

Harpier[3] cries, ''Tis time, 'tis time.'

First Witch

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw.
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Swelter'd venom sleeping got[8],
Boil thou first i'th'charmed[9] pot.

All

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Second Witch

Fillet of a fenny snake[12],
In the cauldron boil and bake:
Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat[15], and tongue of dog,
Adder's fork[16], and blind-worm's[16a] sting,
Lizard's leg, and howlet's[17] wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth[19], boil and bubble.

All

Double, double toil and trouble,
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Third Witch

Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,
Witches' mummy[23], maw and gulf[23a]

Of the ravin'd[24] salt-sea shark,
Root of hemlock[25], digg'd i'th'dark[25a];
Liver of blaspheming[26] Jew,
Gall of goat[27], and slips[27a] of yew,
Sliver'd in the moon's eclipse;
Nose of Turk, and Tartar's lips[29],
Finger of birth-strangl'd babe,
Ditch-deliver'd[31] by a drab[31a],
Make the gruel thick and slab[32].
Add thereto a tiger's chawdron[33]
For th'ingredience[34] of our cauldron.

'I conjure you by that which you profess', (*4*, 1, 49). Lennie James as Macbeth, Tricycle Theatre, London, 1995.

All

Double, double toil and trouble,
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble.

Second Witch

Cool it with a baboon's[37] blood,
Then the charm is firm and good.

Enter Hecate[38], *and the other three* Witches

Hecate

O well done! I commend your pains[39],
And every one shall share i'th'gains;
And now about the cauldron sing
Like elves and fairies in a ring,
Enchanting all that you put in.

Music, and a song, 'Black spirits, etc.'

[*Exeunt* Hecate *and the other three* Witches[43]

Second Witch

By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes;
Open locks, whoever knocks.

Enter Macbeth

Macbeth

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!
What is't you do?

All the Witches

A deed without a name.

Macbeth

I conjure you by that which you profess[49],
Howe'er you come to know it, answer me.
Though[51] you untie the winds and let them fight
Against the churches, though the yeasty[52] waves
Confound and swallow navigation[53] up,
Though bladed corn[54] be lodg'd[54a] and trees blown down,
Though castles topple on their warders' heads,
Though palaces and pyramids[56] do slope
Their heads to their foundations, though the treasure
Of nature's germen[58] tumble altogether
Even [59a]till destruction sicken[59]: answer me
To what I ask you.

First Witch

Speak.

Second Witch

Demand.

Third Witch

We'll answer.

First Witch

Say, if thou'dst rather hear it from our mouths,
Or from our masters'[62]?

Macbeth

Call 'em, let me see 'em.

First Witch

Pour in sow's blood, that hath eaten
Her nine farrow[64]; grease that's sweaten[64a]
From the murderer's gibbet[65] throw
Into the flame.

All the Witches

Come high or low:
Thyself and office[67] deftly show.

Thunder. *Enter* First Apparition, *an armed*[67a] *Head*

Macbeth

Tell me, thou unknown power—

First Witch

He knows thy thought:
Hear his speech, but say thou nought.

First Apparition

Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth: beware Macduff,
Beware the Thane of Fife[71]. Dismiss me. Enough.

[*Descends*[71a]

Macbeth

Whate'er thou art, for thy good caution[72], thanks;
Thou hast harp'd[73] my fear aright. But one word more—

First Witch

He will not be commanded. Here's another,
More potent than the first.

Thunder. *Enter* Second Apparition, *a bloody Child*

Second Apparition
Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth.
Macbeth
Had I three ears, I'd hear thee.
Second Apparition
Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn
The power of man, for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth.

[*Descends*

Macbeth
Then live, Macduff, what need I fear of thee?
But yet I'll make assurance double sure
And take a bond[83] of fate: thou shalt not live,
That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies[84],
And sleep in spite of thunder.

Thunder. *Enter* Third Apparition, *a Child crowned with a tree in his hand*

What is this,
That rises like the issue[86] of a king
And wears upon his baby-brow the round[87]
And top of sovereignty[88]?
All the Witches
Listen, but speak not to't[88a].
Third Apparition
Be lion-mettl'd[89], proud, and take no care
Who chafes[90], who frets[90a], or where conspirers are.
Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill[92]
Shall come against him.

[*Descends*

Macbeth

That will never be:
Who can impress[94] the forest, bid the tree
Unfix his earthbound root? Sweet bodements[95], good.
Rebellious dead, rise never till the wood
Of Birnam rise, and our high-plac'd Macbeth
Shall live the lease of nature[98], pay[98a] his breath
To time and mortal custom[99]. Yet my heart
Throbs to know one thing. Tell me, if your art
Can tell so much, shall Banquo's issue ever
Reign in this kingdom?

All the Witches

Seek to know no more.

Macbeth

I will be satisfied. Deny me this,
And an eternal curse fall on you. Let me know.

Cauldron descends. *Hautboys*[104]

Why sinks that cauldron? And what noise is this?

First Witch

Show!

Second Witch

Show!

Third Witch

Show!

All the Witches

Show his eyes and grieve his heart,
Come like shadows, so depart.

Enter a show[110] *of eight kings*[110a]*, and the last with a glass*[110b] *in his hand*; Banquo's Ghost *following*

Macbeth

Thou[111] art too like the spirit of Banquo. Down!

Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs. And thy hair,
Thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first;
A third, is like the former.—Filthy hags,
Why do you show me this?—A fourth? Start, eyes[115]!
What, will the line stretch out to th'crack of doom[116]?
Another yet? A seventh? I'll see no more.
And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass
Which shows me many more. And some I see,
That two-fold balls and treble sceptres[120] carry.
Horrible sight! Now I see 'tis true,
For the blood-bolter'd[122] Banquo smiles upon me,
And points at them for his.[123]

[*Exeunt show of kings and* Banquo's Ghost

What, is this so?

First Witch

Ay, sir, all this is so. But why
Stands Macbeth thus amazedly[125]?
Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprites,
And show the best of our delights.
I'll charm the air to give a sound,
While you perform your antic round[129]
That this great king may kindly say,
Our duties did his welcome pay[131].

Music. The Witches *dance, and vanish*

Macbeth

Where are they? Gone? Let this pernicious hour,
Stand aye[133] accursed[133a] in the calendar.
Come in, without there[134]!

Enter Lennox

Lennox

What's your grace's will?

Macbeth

Saw you the weïrd sisters?

Lennox

No, my lord.

Macbeth

Came they not by you?

Lennox

No indeed, my lord.

Macbeth

Infected be the air whereon they ride,
And damn'd all those that trust them. I did hear
The galloping of horse. Who was't came by?

Lennox

'Tis two or three, my lord, that bring you word
Macduff is fled to England.

Macbeth

Fled to England?

Lennox

Ay, my good lord.

Macbeth

[*Aside*] Time, thou anticipat'st my dread[143] exploits;
The[144] flighty purpose never is o'ertook
Unless the deed go with it[145]. From this moment,
The very firstlings of my heart shall be
[146]The firstlings[146a] of my hand[147]. And even now
To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done.
The castle of Macduff I will surprise;
Seize upon Fife; give to th'edge o'th'sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace him in his line[152]. No boasting like a fool;
This deed I'll do before this purpose cool,
But no more sights.—Where are these gentlemen?
Come, bring me where they are.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 4 Scene 1

The witches assemble to meet Macbeth, and promise to answer his questions. Their magic Apparitions comfort him at first—and then give cause for alarm.

1 *brindled cat*: cat with black/brown streaked fur.
2 *hedge-pig*: hedgehog.
3 *Harpier*: This is presumably the name of the witch's 'familiar', or attendant spirit.
8 *Swelter'd … got*: sweated out poison incubated in sleep; the ingredients of the witches' cooking-pot are all items thought by the Elizabethans to be poisonous or unnatural.
9 *charmed*: charmèd.
12 *Fillet … snake*: lengthwise slice of a snake from the fens.
15 *Wool of bat*: short hair from the skin of a bat.
16 *fork*: forked tongue.
blind-worm: slow-worm (a kind of legless lizard).
17 *howlet*: young owl.
19 *hell-broth*: thick soup, strong enough for the devil.
23 *mummy*: mummia, a preparation used in embalming bodies, or taken from embalmed bodies.
maw and gulf: stomach and throat.
24 *ravin'd*: ravenous.
25 *hemlock*: i.e. the 'insane root' (compare *1*, 3, 82).
digg'd … dark: Night-time was best for gathering poisonous herbs and roots.
27 *slips*: cuttings.
26–9 *blaspheming … lips*: The bodily parts are all those of infidels.
27 *goat*: Traditionally a lecherous beast.
31 *Ditch-deliver'd*: born in a ditch.
drab: prostitute.
32 *slab*: semi-solid.
33 *chawdron*: entrails.
34 *ingredience*: mixture of ingredients.

37 *baboon*: Another traditionally evil and lustful creature.

38s.d.–43s.d. *Enter Hecate … Witches*: These lines (like the whole of *Act 3*, Scene 5) are almost certainly not Shakespeare's work; see 'Source, Text, and Date', here, and '*Macbeth*: the source', here.

39 *I … pains*: I appreciate the trouble you have taken.

49 *conjure … profess*: call upon you solemnly in the name of that magic you practise ('profess').

51–9 *Though … sicken*: Macbeth is prepared to risk all the common hazards of witchcraft.

52 *yeasty*: frothy, foaming (like a liquid when yeast has been added).

53 *navigation*: shipping.

54 *bladed corn*: unripe corn (where the 'blade' still surrounds the 'ear').
lodg'd: flattened, broken down (by wind and rain).

56 *pyramids*: obelisks, pillars.

58 *nature's germen*: seeds, basic matter, of all creation; compare 'seeds of time' (*1*, 3, 56).

59 *till destruction sicken*: until destruction itself is sick (because so much has been destroyed).

62 *our masters'*: the mouths of our masters—i.e. the evil spirits that the witches serve.

64 *nine farrow*: litter of nine piglets.
sweaten: exuded.

65 *gibbet*: gallows.

67 *office*: function.

67s.d. *armed*: armoured, helmeted.

71 *Thane of Fife*: Macduff; see '*Macbeth*: the source', here.

71s.d. *Descends*: This stage direction from the Folio text suggests that the Apparitions would disappear through a trap-door in the stage.

72 *caution*: warning.

73 *harp'd*: guessed, hit upon.

83 *bond*: contract, legal surety; by killing Macduff, Macbeth will guarantee that Fate will keep the promise of the second Apparition.

84 *That … lies*: so that I can tell these cowardly fears they are false.

86 *issue*: descendant.

87–8 *round … sovereignty*: the crown.

88 *speak not to't*: Spectators were usually warned to keep silent in the presence of supernatural phenomena.

89 *lion-mettl'd*: lion-hearted.

90 *chafes*: is angry.

frets: complains.

92 *Birnam … Hill*: Birnam Wood was about twelve miles from Dunsinane.

94 *impress*: press-gang.

95 *bodements*: predictions.

98 *the lease of nature*: a natural lifespan.

98–9 *pay … custom*: give up his life (as though he were paying a debt) to a normal old age.

104s.d. *Hautboys*: reed instruments, ancestors of the modern oboe.

110s.d. *show*: dumb-show.

eight kings: i.e. the Stuart monarchs who claimed descent from Banquo; James VI and I, then King of England, would be the latest of these—but his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, is excluded; she was executed by Queen Elizabeth's command in 1587.

glass: i.e. a magic crystal permitting visions of the future.

111–23 *Thou … his*: Macbeth comments on the kings as they pass before him.

115 *Start, eyes*: let my eyes jump out of my head.

116 *crack of doom*: break of Judgement Day (Doomsday).

120 *two-fold … sceptres*: i.e. the twin orbs of the English and Scottish crowns, and the sceptres of England, Scotland, and Wales.

122 *blood-bolter'd*: covered in clotted blood.

125 *amazedly*: bewildered.

129 *antic round*: grotesque dance (perhaps in a circle round Macbeth).

131 *Our … pay*: our homage has given him the welcome he deserves.

133 *aye*: for ever.
accursed: accursèd.

134 *without there*: whoever is outside (offstage).

143 *dread*: terrible.

144–145 *The … with it*: it's impossible to act as quick as thought unless intention and action go together.

146–147 *The firstlings … hand*: as soon as I get an idea, I'll carry it out.
firstlings: firstborn things.

152 *trace … line*: descend from him, are of his lineage.

SCENE 2

Fife: Macduff's castle. Enter Lady Macduff, *her* son, *and* Ross

Lady Macduff

What had he done, to make him fly the land?

Ross

You must have patience, madam.

Lady Macduff

He had none;
His flight was madness. When[3] our actions do not,
Our fears do make us traitors[4].

Ross

You know not
Whether it was his wisdom or his fear.

Lady Macduff

Wisdom? To leave his wife, to leave his babes,
His mansion, and his titles[7] in a place
From whence himself does fly? He loves us not.
He wants the natural touch[9], for the poor wren,
The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.
All[12] is the fear, and nothing is the love;
As little is the wisdom, where the flight
So runs against all reason[14].

Ross

My dearest coz[14a],
I pray you school[15] yourself. But for[15a] your husband,
He is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows
The fits o'th'season[17]. I dare not speak much further,
But cruel are the times when[18] we are traitors
And do not know ourselves[19], when we hold[19a] rumour
From what we fear, yet know not what we fear[20],
But float upon a wild and violent sea,
Each way and none[22]. I take my leave of you;

Shall not be long but I'll be here again[23].
Things at the worst will cease, or else climb upward[24]
To what they were before. My pretty cousin,
Blessing upon you.

Lady Macduff

Father'd he is, and yet he's fatherless.

Ross

I am so much a fool, should I stay longer
It would be my disgrace and your discomfort[29].
I take my leave at once.

[*Exit*

Lady Macduff

Sirrah[30], your father's dead,
And what will you do now? How will you live?

Son

As birds do, mother.

Lady Macduff

What, with worms and flies?

Son

With what I get I mean, and so do they.

Lady Macduff

Poor bird, thou'dst never fear the net[34], nor lime[34a], the pitfall[35], nor the gin[35a].

Son

Why should I, mother? Poor birds they are not set for[36].
My father is not dead for all your saying.

Lady Macduff

Yes, he is dead. How wilt thou do for a father?

Son

Nay, how will you do for a husband?

Lady Macduff

Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.

Son

Then you'll buy 'em to sell again.[41]

Lady Macduff

Thou speak'st with all thy wit, and yet i'faith with wit[42] enough for thee[43].

Son

Was my father a traitor, mother?

Lady Macduff

Ay, that he was.

Son

What is a traitor?

Lady Macduff

Why, one that swears[47] and lies.

Son

And be all traitors, that do so?

Lady Macduff

Every one that does so is a traitor and must be hanged.

Son

And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?

Lady Macduff

Every one.

Son

Who must hang them?

Lady Macduff

Why, the honest men.

Son

Then the liars and swearers are fools, for there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men and hang them up.

Lady Macduff

Now God help thee, poor monkey, but how wilt thou do for a father?

Son

If he were dead, you'd weep for him; if you would not, it were a good sign that I should quickly have a new father.

Lady Macduff

Poor prattler, how thou talk'st!

Enter a Messenger

Messenger

Bless you, fair dame. I am not to you known,

Though in your state of honour I am perfect[63];
I doubt[64] some danger does approach you nearly.
If you will take a homely[65] man's advice,
Be not found here. Hence with your little ones.
To fright you thus, methinks I am too savage;
To do worse to you were fell[68] cruelty,
Which is too nigh[69] your person. Heaven preserve you,
I dare abide no longer.

[*Exit*

Lady Macduff

Whither should I fly?
I have done no harm. But I remember now
I am in this earthly world where to do harm
Is often laudable, to do good sometime
Accounted dangerous folly. Why then, alas,
Do I put up that womanly defence,
To say I have done no harm?

Enter Murderers

What are these faces?

A Murderer

Where is your husband?

Lady Macduff

I hope in no place so unsanctified[78],
Where such as thou mayst find him.

A Murderer

He's a traitor.

Son

Thou liest, thou shag-hair'd villain.

A Murderer

What, you egg[80]!
Young fry[81] of treachery!

Kills him

Son

He has kill'd me, mother.

Run away, I pray you!

[*Exit* Lady Macduff *crying 'Murder'*, *pursued by* Murderers *with her* Son

Notes

Act 4 Scene 2

Lady Macduff questions Ross about her husband's flight, and then tries to explain the situation to her son. A Messenger warns her to make a quick getaway, but Macbeth's murderers burst into the room before she can take his advice.

3–4 *When … traitors*: even when we have done nothing, we are still traitors for running away in fear.

7 *titles*: entitlements, the things belonging to his title of nobility.

9 *wants … touch*: lacks natural feelings.

12–14 *All … reason*: when it is so unreasonable to run away, it shows neither concern for his family ('love') nor wisdom, but only selfish fear.

14 *coz*: cousin (a general term of endearment).

15 *school*: control.

for: as for.

17 *fits o'th'season*: mood of the times.

18–19 *when … ourselves*: we behave in uncharacteristic ways and don't know what we are doing.

19–20 *hold … fear*: believe rumours because we are fearful.

22 *Each … none*: this way and that, and get nowhere in the end.

23 *Shall … again*: it won't be long before I come back.

24 *climb upward*: get better, improve.

29 *It would … discomfort*: Ross is afraid that he will be moved to tears, embarrassing himself and Lady Macduff.

30 *Sirrah*: A term of endearment (as used here), abuse, or condescension.

34–5 *net … gin*: Lady Macduff lists different methods of catching birds.

34 *lime*: sticky lime on tree branches.

35 *pitfall*: covered hole.

gin: snare.

36 *Poor … for*: traps aren't set for fowls of inferior species.

41 *Then … again*: if you can get them so easily, you will not want to keep them.

42 *wit*: intelligence.
43 *for thee*: for your age.
47 *swears*: takes an oath.
63 *in your state … perfect*: I know your rank and reputation very well.
64 *doubt*: fear, suspect.
65 *homely*: humble.
68 *fell*: pitiless.
69 *nigh*: near.
78 *unsanctified*: accursed.
80 *egg*: youngster.
81 *fry*: spawn, offspring.

SCENE 3

The English Court: *enter* Malcolm *and* Macduff

Malcolm

Let us seek out some desolate shade and there
Weep our sad bosoms empty.

Macduff

Let us rather
Hold fast the mortal[3] sword and like[3a] good men
Bestride our downfall birthdom[4]; each new morn,
New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
As if it felt with Scotland and yell'd out
Like[8] syllable of dolour.

Malcolm

What I believe, I'll wail[8a];
What know, believe[9]; and what I can redress[9a],
As I shall find the time to friend[10], I will.
Wha you have spoke, it may be so perchance.[11]
This tyrant, whose sole name[12] blisters our tongues,
Was once thought honest; you have lov'd him well—
He hath not touch'd[14] you yet. I am young, but something[14a]
You may discern of him through me[15], and wisdom[15a]
To offer up a weak, poor innocent lamb[16]
T'appease an angry god.

Macduff

I am not treacherous.

Malcolm

But Macbeth is.
A good[19] and virtuous nature may recoil
In an imperial charge[20]. But I shall crave your pardon:
That which you are, my thoughts cannot transpose[21];
Angels[22] are bright still, though the brightest[22a] fell.
Though[23] all things foul would wear the brows[23a] of grace,

Yet grace must still look so[24].

Macduff

I have lost my hopes.

Malcolm

Perchance[25] even there[25a] where I did find my doubts.
Why in that rawness[26] left you wife and child,
Those precious motives[27], those strong knots[27a] of love,
Without leave-taking? I pray you,
Let[29] not my jealousies be your dishonours,
But mine own safeties[30]; you may be rightly just,
Whatever I shall think.

Macduff

Bleed, bleed, poor country.
Great tyranny[32], lay thou thy basis sure,
For goodness dare not check thee[33]; wear[33a] thou thy wrongs,
The title is affeer'd[34]. Fare thee well, lord,
I would not be the villain that thou think'st
For the whole space that's in the tyrant's grasp,
And the rich East to boot[37].

Malcolm

Be not offended.
I speak not as in absolute fear[38] of you:
I think our country sinks beneath the yoke[39];
It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash
Is added to her wounds. I think withal[41]
There would be hands uplifted in my right,
And here from gracious England[43] have I offer
Of goodly thousands. But for all this,
When I shall tread upon the tyrant's head,
Or wear it on my sword, yet my poor country
Shall have more vices than it had before,
More[48] suffer, and more sundry ways than ever,
By him that shall succeed[49].

Macduff

What should he be?

Malcolm

It is myself I mean—in whom I know
All the particulars of vice so grafted[51]
Than when they shall be open'd[52], black Macbeth
Will seem as pure as snow, and the poor state
Esteem him as a lamb, being compar'd
With my confineless harms[55].

Macduff

Not in the legions[55a]
Of horrid hell can come a devil more damn'd
In evils to top Macbeth.

Malcolm

I grant him bloody,
[58]Luxurious, avaricious, false, deceitful,
Sudden[59], malicious, smacking[59a] of every sin
That has a name. But there's no bottom, none,
In my voluptuousness: your wives, your daughters,
Your matrons, and your maids could not fill up
The cistern[63] of my lust, and my desire[63a]
All continent impediments would o'erbear
That did oppose my will[65]. Better Macbeth,
Than such an one to reign.

Macduff

Boundless[66] intemperance
In nature is a tyranny[67]; it hath[67a] been
Th'untimely emptying of the happy throne[68]
And fall of many kings. But fear not yet
To take upon you what is yours: you may
Convey your pleasures in a spacious plenty[71]
And yet seem cold. The time you may so hoodwink[72].
We have willing dames enough; there cannot be
That vulture[74] in you to devour so many
As will to greatness dedicate[75] themselves,
Finding it so inclin'd[76].

Malcolm

With this, there grows
In my most ill-compos'd affection[77] such
A stanchless[78] avarice that, were I king,
I should cut off[79] the nobles for their lands,
Desire his jewels, and this other's house[80],
And my[81] more-having would be as a sauce
To make me hunger more[82], that I should forge
Quarrels unjust against the good and loyal,
Destroying them for wealth.

Macduff

This avarice
Sticks deeper[85], grows with more pernicious root
Than summer-seeming lust[86], and it hath been
The sword of our slain kings[87]; yet do not fear,
Scotland[88] hath foisons to fill up your will
Of your mere own[89]. All these are portable[89a],
With other graces weigh'd[90].

Malcolm

But I have none. The king-becoming graces[91]—
As justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness,
Bounty, perseverance[93], mercy, lowliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude—
I have no relish[95] of them, but abound
In the division[96] of each several[96a] crime,
Acting it many ways. Nay, had I power, I should[97]
Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell[98],
Uproar[99] the universal peace, confound
All unity on earth.

Macduff

O Scotland, Scotland!

Malcolm

If such a one be fit to govern, speak.
I am as I have spoken.

Macduff

Fit to govern?

No, not to live. O nation miserable!
With an untitl'd[104] tyrant, bloody-sceptr'd[104a],
When shalt thou see thy wholesome days again,
Since that the truest issue of thy throne
By[107] his own interdiction[107a] stands accurs'd
And does blaspheme his breed[108]? Thy royal father
Was a most sainted king; the queen that bore thee,
Oft'ner upon her knees than on her feet,
Died every day she lived[111]. Fare thee well,
These[112] evils thou repeat'st upon thyself
Hath banish'd me from Scotland[113]. O my breast,
Thy hope ends here.

Malcolm

Macduff, this noble passion,
Child of integrity[115], hath from my soul
Wip'd the black scruples[116], reconcil'd my thoughts
To thy good truth and honour. Devilish Macbeth
By many of these trains[118] hath sought to win me
Into his power, and modest[119] wisdom plucks me
From over-credulous haste[120]; but God above
Deal between thee and me, for even now
I put myself to thy direction and
Unspeak mine own detraction, here abjure[123]
The taints and blames I laid upon myself[124],
For strangers to my nature. I am yet
Unknown to woman[126], never was forsworn[126a],
Scarcely have coveted what was mine own,
At no time broke my faith, would not betray
The devil to his fellow, and delight
No less in truth than life. My first false speaking
Was this upon myself. What I am truly
Is thine, and my poor country's, to command:
Whither indeed, before thy here-approach[133],
Old Siward[134] with ten thousand warlike men
Already at a point[135] was setting forth.

Now we'll together[136], and the chance[136a] of goodness
Be like our warranted quarrel[137]. Why are you silent?

Macduff

Such welcome and unwelcome things at once,
'Tis hard to reconcile[139].

Enter a Doctor

Malcolm

Well, more anon[139a].—
Comes the king forth, I pray you?

Doctor

Ay, sir: there are a crew of wretched souls
That stay his cure[142]; their malady convinces[142a]
The great assay of art[143], but at his touch,
Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand,
They presently amend[145].

[*Exit*

Malcolm

I thank you, doctor.

Macduff

What's the disease he means?

Malcolm

'Tis called the Evil.
A most miraculous work in this good king,
Which often since my here-remain in England
I have seen him do. How he solicits[151] heaven
Himself best knows, but strangely visited[152] people
All swoll'n and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The mere[154] despair of surgery, he cures,
Hanging a golden stamp[155] about their necks
Put on with holy prayers, and 'tis spoken
To the succeeding royalty he leaves
The healing benediction[158]. With this strange virtue,
He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy,

And sundry blessings hang about his throne
That speak him full of grace.

Enter Ross

Macduff

See who comes here.

Malcolm

My countryman, but yet I know him not[162].

Macduff

My ever gentle[163] cousin, welcome hither.

Malcolm

I know him now. Good God betimes[164] remove
The means[165] that makes us strangers.

Ross

Sir, amen.

Macduff

Stands Scotland where it did?[166]

Ross

Alas, poor country,
Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot
Be call'd our mother, but our grave, where nothing[168],
But who knows nothing, is once[169] seen to smile[169a];
Where sighs, and groans, and shrieks that rend the air
Are made, not mark'd; where violent sorrow seems
A modern ecstasy[172]. The deadman's[172a] knell
Is there scarce ask'd for who[173], and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying or ere[175] they sicken.

Macduff

O relation
Too nice[176], and yet too true.

Malcolm

What's the newest grief?

Ross

That[177] of an hour's age doth hiss the speaker;
Each minute teems a new one[178].

Macduff

How does[178a] my wife?

Ross

Why, well.

Macduff

And all my children?

Ross

Well, too.

Macduff

The tyrant has not batter'd at their peace?

Ross

No, they were well at peace when I did leave 'em.

Macduff

Be not a niggard[182] of your speech: how goes't?

Ross

When[183] I came hither to transport the tidings
Which I have heavily borne, there ran a rumour
Of many worthy fellows that were out[185],
Which[186] was to my belief witness'd the rather
For that I saw the tyrant's power afoot[187].
Now is the time of help. [*To* Malcolm] Your eye[188] in Scotland
Would create soldiers, make our women fight
To doff[190] their dire distresses[190a].

Malcolm

Be't their comfort

We are coming thither. Gracious England hath
Lent us good Siward and ten thousand men—
An[193] older and a better soldier none
That Christendom gives out[194].

Ross

Would I could answer

This comfort with the like. But I have words
That would be[196] howl'd out in the desert air,

Where hearing should not latch[197] them.

Macduff

What concern they?

The general cause, or is it a fee-grief[198]
Due to some single breast?[199]

Ross

No mind that's honest
But in it shares some woe, though the main part
Pertains to you alone.

Macduff

If it be mine,
Keep it not from me; quickly let me have it.

Ross

Let not your ears despise my tongue forever
Which shall possess them with the heaviest sound
That ever yet they heard.

Macduff

H'm—I guess at it.

Ross

Your castle is surpris'd; your wife and babes
Savagely slaughter'd. To relate the manner
Were on the quarry of these murder'd deer[208]
To add the death of you.

Malcolm

Merciful heaven—
What, man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows[210]:
Give sorrow words; the grief[211] that does not speak,
Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break[212].

Macduff

My children too?

Ross

Wife, children, servants, all
That could be found.

Macduff

And I must be from thence?[214]

My wife kill'd too?

Ross

I have said.

Malcolm

Be comforted.
Let's make us med'cines of our great revenge
To cure this deadly grief.

Macduff

He has no children[218]. All my pretty ones?
Did you say all? O hell-kite[219]! All?
What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
At one fell swoop?[221]

Malcolm

Dispute[222] it like a man[222a].

Macduff

I shall do so;
But I must also feel it as a man[224];
I cannot but remember such things were
That were most precious to me. Did heaven look on,
And would not take their part? Sinful Macduff,
They were all struck for thee[228]. Naught[228a] that I am,
Not for their own demerits[229] but for mine,
Fell slaughter on their souls. Heaven rest them now.

Malcolm

Be this the whetstone of your sword, let grief
Convert to anger. Blunt not the heart, enrage it.

Macduff

O, I could play the woman with mine eyes[233]
And braggart[234] with my tongue. But gentle heavens,
Cut short all intermission[235]. Front to front[235a]
Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;
Within my sword's length set him. If[237] he scape,
Heaven forgive him too[238].

Malcolm

This tune goes manly.

Come, go we to the king; our power is ready;
Our lack is nothing but our leave[240]. Macbeth
Is ripe for shaking, and the powers above
Put on their instruments[242]. Receive what cheer you may:
The night is long that never finds the day.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 4 Scene 3

At the English court Malcolm and Macduff test each other's loyalties. There are plans to attack Macbeth—and Macduff hears the news of the murder of his wife and children.

3 *mortal*: deadly, death-dealing.

3–4 *like … birthdom*: protect the country of our birth from ruin as good soldiers stand astride a fallen comrade.

8 *Like*: the same.

wail: lament, grieve for.

9 *What … believe*: only believe what I know to be true.

redress: put right.

10 *As … friend*: when the time is right.

11 *What … perchance*: perhaps what you say is true.

12 *sole name*: name alone.

14 *touch'd*: harmed.

14–15 *something … me*: you may gain something from him through betraying me.

wisdom: it is wisdom.

16 *innocent lamb*: The image of the sacrificial lamb is central to the Christian religion.

19–20 *A good … charge*: Malcolm suggests that Macduff's honourable nature may have degenerated under Macbeth's government.

21 *That … transpose*: my suspicious thoughts can't change your nature.

22 *Angels … fell*: there are still some bright-shining angels, although the brightest of them fell from God's grace.

the brightest: Lucifer ('the light-bearer') who rebelled against God and was thrown down from heaven (Isaiah 14: 4,12).

23–4 *Though … so*: if everything that's evil tried to look virtuous, virtue would still look the same.

brows: forehead, appearance.

25 *Perchance*: perhaps.

even there: i.e. in Macduff's flight to England: Macduff had been hoping that he could

overthrow Macbeth—but his sudden flight to England has aroused Malcolm's suspicions.

26 *rawness*: exposed situation.

27 *motives*: reasons for staying in Scotland.

knots: ties.

29–30 *Let … safeties*: my suspicions are not meant to dishonour you but to protect myself.

32–3 *tyranny … check thee*: tyranny can make itself secure, since virtue—Malcolm—dare not oppose it.

33–4 *wear … affeer'd*: Macbeth can wear his stolen crown because his title to it is legally confirmed ('affeer'd' is a legal term) by Malcolm's ineffectiveness.

37 *to boot*: in addition.

38 *in absolute fear*: entirely in fear.

39 *the yoke*: i.e. Macbeth's government; the 'yoke' fastens oxen to the plough.

41 *withal*: as well.

43 *England*: the King of England, Edward the Confessor.

48–9 *More … succeed*: suffer more, and in many more different ways, under his successor; see '*Macbeth*: the source', here.

51 *grafted*: made part of me (as gardeners graft plants together).

52 *open'd*: i.e. like buds; Malcolm continues the gardening image.

55 *confineless harms*: boundless injuries.

legions: multitudes, battalions.

58 *Luxurious*: lascivious, lecherous.

59 *Sudden*: rash, impulsive.

smacking: tasting.

63 *cistern*: tank, container of fluids.

63–5 *my desire … will*: my lust would overflow all barriers of restraint that opposed me.

66–7 *Boundless … tyranny*: lack of self-control is a tyranny in a man's character.

67–8 *it hath … throne*: it has caused many thrones to become vacant prematurely.

71 *Convey … plenty*: have plenty of scope to carry on as you please.

72 *hoodwink*: deceive (by blindfolding).

74 *vulture*: The bird is the epitome of greediness.

75–6 *dedicate … inclin'd*: offer themselves in (sexual) service to the king as soon as they know he likes that sort of thing.

77 *ill-compos'd affection*: unbalanced disposition.

78 *stanchless*: unstoppable, insatiable.

79 *cut off*: put to death.

80 *his … house*: this man's jewels, and that man's house.

81–2 *my … more*: the more I had, the more I would want.

85 *Sticks deeper*: is more deeply rooted.

86 *summer-seeming lust*: lust which is hot but transitory, lasting only for the summer of a man's life.

87 *sword … kings*: the death of some Scottish kings.

88–9 *Scotland … own*: you have rich harvests ('foisons') of your own in Scotland that should satisfy you.

89 *portable*: bearable.

90 *weigh'd*: balanced.

91 *king-becoming graces*: virtues appropriate for a king.

93 *perseverance*: The stress is on the second syllable.

95 *relish*: trace.

96 *division*: variation.

several: particular, individual.

97–8 *I should … hell*: I would say 'To hell with all harmony'.

99 *Uproar*: cause uproar among.

104 *untitl'd*: illegitimate, having no right to the title.

bloody-sceptr'd: holding the sceptre through bloodshed.

107–8 *By … breed*: by his own act convicts himself of treachery, and defames his own birth and heritage.

107 *interdiction*: legal restraint placed on those incapable of managing their own affairs.

111 *Died … lived*: lived each day as though it were her last; compare St Paul's claim, 'I die daily' (1 Corinthians 15:31).

112–13 *These … Scotland*: it's just those crimes you accuse yourself of [committed by Macbeth] that have forced me to leave Scotland.

115 *Child of integrity*: Macduff's grief for Scotland could only spring from his honesty.

116 *scruples*: doubts.

118 *trains*: stratagems.

119–20 *modest … haste*: cautious wisdom prevents me from trusting people too quickly.

123–4 *abjure … myself*: renounce all the accusations I made against myself.

126 *Unknown to woman*: a virgin.

was forsworn: committed perjury.

133 *here-approach*: coming here.

134 *Old Siward*: The Earl of Northumberland.

135 *at a point*: in readiness.

136 *we'll together*: we'll go together.

136–7 *chance … quarrel*: may our chances of success be as good as our cause is lawful.

139 *'Tis … reconcile*: Macduff is not completely convinced by Malcolm.

more anon: we'll talk more about it later.

142 *stay his cure*: wait for his healing touch; Edward the Confessor was thought to possess a heavenly power, which he bequeathed to succeeding monarchs, to cure scrofula—an inflammation of the lymph nodes which was popularly known as the 'King's Evil'.

convinces: overcomes, baffles.

143 *great … art*: greatest efforts of medical skill.

145 *presently amend*: recover at once.

151 *solicits*: entreats.

152 *visited*: afflicted.

154 *mere*: complete.

155 *stamp*: coin, medal; Queen Elizabeth and King James both gave coins to those they 'touched'.

158 *healing benediction*: blessed gift of healing.

162 *My … not*: Ross is probably identifiable as a Scot by his tartan clothing.

163 *ever gentle*: always noble.

164 *betimes*: as soon as possible.

165 *means*: circumstances.

166 *Stands … did*: is Scotland still the same as it was.

168–9 *nothing … smile*: the only people to smile are those who don't know what's going on.

169 *once*: ever.

172 *modern ecstasy*: everyday emotion.

172–3 *The deadman's … who*: hardly anyone bothers to ask who is dead when they hear a funeral bell.

175 *or ere*: before.

176 *nice*: accurate.

177–8 *That … one*: people mock the speaker who tells a tale that's an hour old because every minute brings ('teems' = breeds) a new one.

178 *does*: is.

182 *niggard*: miser.

183–90 *When … distresses*: Ross dodges Macduff's question about his family.

185 *out*: preparing for war.

186–7 *Which … afoot*: I had evidence to confirm my belief when I saw Macbeth's army on the move.

188 *eye*: presence in person.

190 *doff*: cast off (like clothes).

193–4 *An … out*: no soldier in the whole Christian kingdom is said to be a more experienced ('older') and better soldier.

196 *would be*: ought to be.

197 *latch*: catch.

198–9 *a fee-grief … breast*: very personal grief belonging to one person alone; Macduff uses legal terminology.

208 *quarry … deer*: piled up bodies of deer killed in a day's hunting; Ross makes a bitter pun on 'deer' and 'dear'.

210 *pull … brows*: Macduff is trying to hide his grief.

211–12 *the grief … break*: when grief doesn't speak out, it breaks the overburdened heart.

214 *from thence*: away from home.

218 *He has no children*: Macduff may refer either to Malcolm (who cannot know a father's feelings), or to Macbeth (who cannot be made to suffer appropriate revenge).

219 *hell-kite*: devilish bird of prey.

221 *one fell swoop*: a single savage attack; the now-proverbial phrase originated here.

222 *Dispute*: bear.
like a man: i.e. bravely.

224 *as a man*: i.e. with grief.

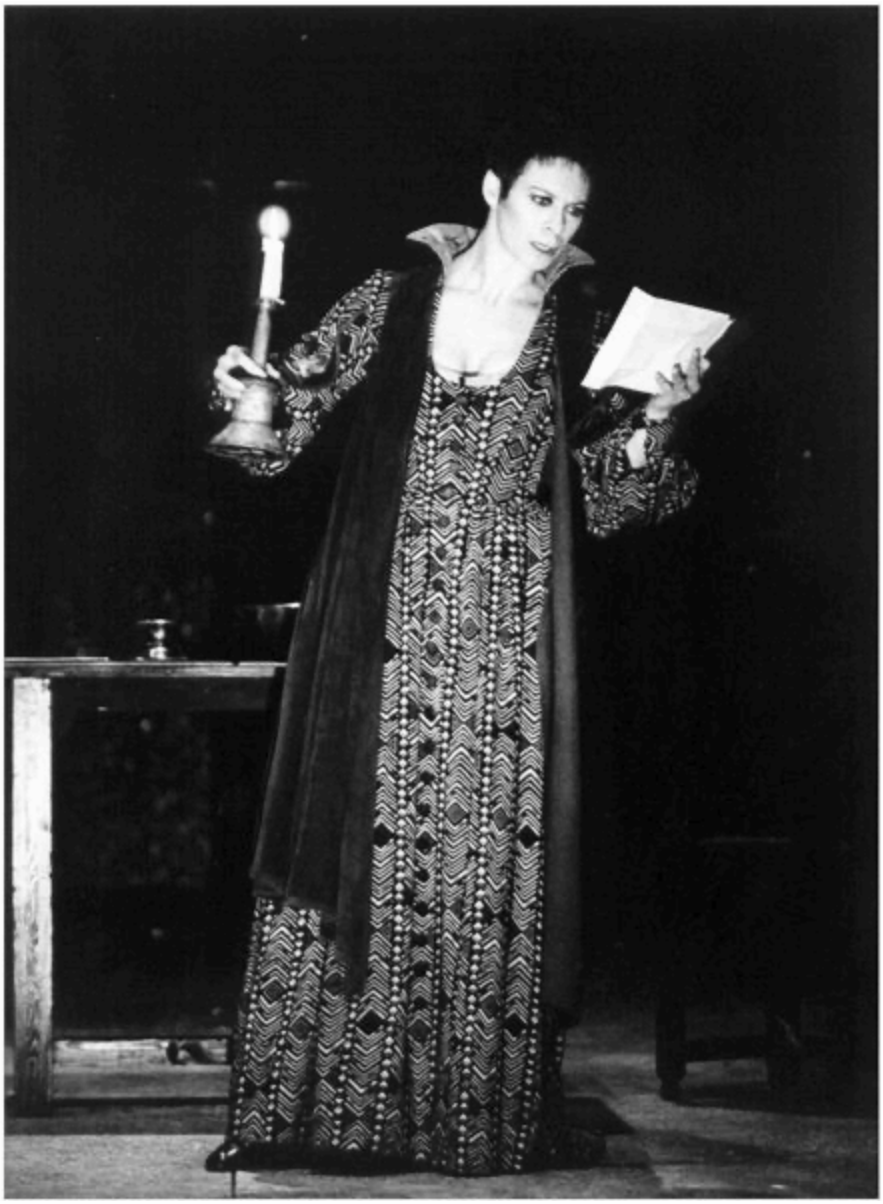
228 *for thee*: because of you.

228–9 *Naught … demerits*: although I am nothing, they were killed because of my failings.

233 *I … eyes*: I could act like a woman and weep.

234 *braggart*: boaster (threatening more than he can do).

235 *intermission*: interval (between now and the time he meets Macbeth).
Front to front: face (forehead) to face.
237–8 *if … too*: may God forgive him also if I allow him to escape.
240 *leave*: permission to depart.
242 *put … instruments*: are arming themselves; Malcolm claims that the forces of good are on his side (just as Lady Macbeth invoked the powers of evil for the murder of Duncan).



‘This is her very guise and, upon my life, fast asleep.’ (*5*, 1, 17–18). Sara Kestelman as Lady Macbeth, Royal Shakespeare Company, 1982.

Act 5

SCENE 1

Lady Macbeth's *apartments: enter a* Doctor of Physic[0], *and a* Waiting-Gentlewoman

Doctor

I have two nights watched[1] with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

Gentlewoman

Since his majesty went into the field[3], I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown[4] upon her, unlock her closet[5], take forth paper, fold[5a] it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal[6] it, and again return to bed, yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

Doctor

A great perturbation[8] in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching[9]. In this slumbery agitation[10], besides her walking and other actual[11] performances, what at any time have you heard her say?

Gentlewoman

That, sir, which I will not report after her[13].

Doctor

You may to me, and 'tis most meet you should.

Gentlewoman

Neither to you, nor anyone, having no witness to confirm my speech.

Enter Lady Macbeth, *with a taper*[16]

Lo you, here she comes. This is her very guise[17] and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her, stand close[18].

Doctor

How came she by that light?

Gentlewoman

Why, it stood by her. She has light by her continually, 'tis her command.

Doctor

You see her eyes are open.

Gentlewoman

Ay, but their sense are shut.

Doctor

What is it she does now? Look how she rubs her hands.

Gentlewoman

It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands; I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

Lady Macbeth

Yet here's a spot.

Doctor

Hark, she speaks; I will set[29] down what comes from her to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

Lady Macbeth

Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One, two[31]. Why then 'tis time to do't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account[34]? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

Doctor

Do you mark that?

Lady Macbeth

The Thane of Fife[38] had a wife. Where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o'that, my lord, no more o'that. You mar all with this starting[40].

Doctor

Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.

Gentlewoman

She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that. Heaven knows what she has known.

Lady Macbeth

Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes[44] of
Arabia[45] will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O.

Doctor

What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged[46].

Gentlewoman

I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity[48] of the whole body.

Doctor

Well, well, well—

Gentlewoman

Pray God it be, sir.

Doctor

This disease is beyond my practice[51]; yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds.

Lady Macbeth

Wash your hands, put on your night-gown, look not so pale. I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on's[56] grave.

Doctor

Even so?

Lady Macbeth

To bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand; what's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed.

[*Exit*

Doctor

Will she go now to bed?

Gentlewoman

Directly.

Doctor

Foul whisp'rings are abroad[63]; unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
More needs she the divine[66] than the physician.
God, God forgive us all. Look after her;
Remove from her the means of all annoyance[68],
And still[69] keep eyes upon her. So, good night,
My mind she has mated[70], and amaz'd[70a] my sight.
I think, but dare not speak.

Gentlewoman

Good night, good doctor.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 5 Scene 1

Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep, dreaming about the murder of Duncan.

0s.d. *Doctor of Physic*: physician.

1 *watched*: stayed awake.

3 *field*: battlefield.

4 *night-gown*: dressing-gown (see *2*, 2, 73).

5 *closet*: cabinet.

fold: Elizabethans folded their writing-paper first to make margins then, after writing, to form envelopes.

6 *seal*: Letters were usually stamped over the folds with the writer's personal seal.

8 *perturbation*: disturbance.

9 *do … watching*: act as though she were awake.

10 *slumbery agitation*: sleeping activity; the Doctor's language is professionally formal.

11 *actual*: active, physical.

13 *report after her*: repeat behind her back.

16s.d. *taper*: candle.

17 *guise*: appearance.

18 *close*: hidden.

29 *set*: write.

31 *One, two*: Lady Macbeth, reliving her past experiences in her sleep, hears the striking of a bell—perhaps that which called Macbeth to murder Duncan (*2*, 1, 62).

34 *none … account*: there's no one who can challenge our authority.

38 *Thane of Fife*: Macduff.

40 *starting*: nervous jumpiness.

44–5 *perfumes of Arabia*: Many spices (from which perfumes were made) were imported from [Saudi] Arabia.

46 *sorely charged*: heavily burdened.

48 *dignity*: status (i.e. Lady Macbeth's status as queen).

51 *practice*: professional skill.

56 *on's*: of his.

63 *abroad*: about, at large.

66 *divine*: priest.

68 *means … annoyance*: anything she might use to harm herself.

69 *still*: always.

70 *mated*: stunned.

amaz'd: bewildered.

Scene 2

*Countryside near Dunsinane. Drum and colours*0. *Enter* Menteith, Caithness, Angus, Lennox, Soldiers

Menteith

The English power1 is near, led on by Malcolm,
His uncle Siward, and the good Macduff.
Revenges3 burn in them, for their3a dear causes
Would to the bleeding4 and the grim alarm
Excite the mortified5 man5a.

Angus

Near Birnam Wood
Shall we well meet them; that way are they coming.

Caithness

Who knows if Donaldbain be with his brother?

Lennox

For certain, sir, he is not. I have a file
Of all the gentry; there is Siward's son
And many unrough10 youths that even now

Protest their first of manhood[11].

Menteith

What does the tyrant?

Caithness

Great Dunsinane he strongly fortifies.
Some say he's mad; others that lesser hate him
Do call it valiant fury, but for certain
He cannot buckle[15] his distemper'd cause
Within the belt of rule[16].

Angus

Now does he feel
His secret murders sticking on his hands.
Now minutely revolts upbraid his faith-breach[18];
Those he commands, move[19] only in command,
Nothing in love[20]. Now[20a] does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
Upon a dwarfish thief[22].

Menteith

Who then shall blame
His pester'd[23] senses to recoil and start
When all[24] that is within him does condemn
Itself for being there[25]?

Caithness

Well, march we on
To give obedience where 'tis truly ow'd;
Meet we the med'cine[27] of the sickly weal[27a],
And with him pour[28] we in our country's purge,
Each drop of us[29].

Lennox

Or so much as it needs
To dew[30] the sovereign flower and drown the weeds.
Make we our march towards Birnam.

[*Exeunt, marching*

Notes

Act 5 Scene 2

A section of the army marches towards Dunsinane, and their leaders discuss the enemy, Macbeth, who is showing signs of panic.

0s.d. *Drum and colours*: military sounds and regimental banners.

1 *power*: force.

3 *Revenges*: desires for revenge.

3–5 *their … man*: those great causes would be enough to rouse a dead man to answer a call to arms in bloody warfare.

4 *bleeding*: bloodshed.

5 *mortified*: dead, insensible.

10 *unrough*: beardless.

11 *Protest … manhood*: show that now they have reached manhood.

15–16 *buckle … rule*: contain his disordered government through control by force.

18 *minutely … breach*: every minute new revolts reproach him for his own treason.

19–20 *move … love*: act in obedience only and not in loyalty.

20–2 *Now … thief*: Once again titles and ambitions are described in terms of clothing.

23 *pester'd*: vexed.

24–5 *all … there*: Macbeth's own nature is in rebellion against himself.

27 *med'cine*: physician—i.e. Malcolm.
weal: land.

28–9 *pour … us*: pour out every drop of our blood to cleanse our country; blood-letting—drawing blood from a patient—was regularly used in the treatment of diseases.

30 *dew*: water.

SCENE 3

Dunsinane, Macbeth*'s castle: enter* Macbeth, Doctor, *and* Attendants

Macbeth

Bring me no more reports, let them[1] fly all;
Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane,
I cannot taint[3] with fear. What's the boy Malcolm?
Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know
All mortal consequences[5] have pronounc'd me thus:
'Fear not, Macbeth, no man that's born of woman
Shall e'er have power upon thee.' Then fly false thanes
And mingle with the English epicures[8];
The mind I sway[9] by and the heart I bear
Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear.

Enter Servant

The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac'd[11] loon[11a].
Where got'st thou that goose-look?

Servant

There is ten thousand—

Macbeth

Geese, villain?

Servant

Soldiers, sir.

Macbeth

Go prick thy face and over-red[14] thy fear,
Thou lily-liver'd[15] boy. What soldiers, patch[15a]?
Death of thy soul, those linen cheeks of thine
Are counsellors to fear. What soldiers, whey-face[17]?

Servant

The English force, so please you.

Macbeth

Take thy face hence!

[*Exit* Servant

Seyton!—I am sick at heart,
When I behold—Seyton, I say!—this push[20]
Will cheer[21] me ever or disseat[21a] me now.
I have liv'd long enough. My way of life[22]
Is fall'n into the sere[23a], the yellow leaf[23],
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour[27], breath
Which the poor heart would fain[28] deny, and dare not.
Seyton!

Enter Seyton

Seyton
What's your gracious pleasure?
Macbeth
What news more?
Seyton
All is confirm'd, my lord, which was reported.
Macbeth
I'll fight till from my bones my flesh be hack'd.
Give me my armour.
Seyton
'Tis not needed yet.
Macbeth
I'll put it on;
Send out more horses; skirr[36] the country round.
Hang those that talk of fear. Give me mine armour.
How does your patient, doctor?
Doctor
Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming[39] fancies
That keep her from her rest.
Macbeth
Cure her of that.

Canst thou not minister to[41] a mind diseas'd,
Pluck from the memory a rooted[42] sorrow,
Raze[43] out the written[43a] troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious[44] antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom[45] of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

Doctor

Therein the patient
Must minister to himself.

Macbeth

Throw physic to the dogs, I'll none of it.
Come, put mine armour on; give me my staff.—
Seyton, send out.—Doctor, the thanes fly from me.—
[*To* Attendant] Come sir, dispatch[51].—If thou couldst, doctor, cast[51a]
The water[52] of my land, find her disease,
And purge it to a sound and pristine[53] health,
I would applaud thee to the very echo
That should applaud again.—Pull't off[55], I say!—
What rhubarb, cynne[56], or what purgative drug
Would scour[57] these English hence? Hear'st thou of them?

Doctor

Ay, my good lord; your royal preparation[58]
Makes us hear something.

Macbeth

Bring it after me[59].—
I will not be afraid of death and bane[60],
Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane.

[*Exeunt all but* Doctor

Doctor

Were I from Dunsinane away and clear,
Profit again should hardly draw me here[63].

Exit

Notes

Act 5 Scene 3

Macbeth learns of the approaching armies; he discusses his wife's condition with the Doctor, then goes off to battle.

1 *them*: the thanes.

3 *taint*: go rotten, lose courage.

5 *mortal consequences*: human fates.

8 *The English epicures*: the soft-living English.

9 *sway*: rule myself.

11 *cream-fac'd*: white-faced.

loon: lound—a Scottish term of abuse (= villain, rogue).

14 *over-red*: redden over, paint red over.

15 *lily-liver'd*: with a bloodless liver (traditionally thought to be the seat of courage).

patch: idiot.

17 *whey-face*: milk-face; 'whey' is the thin white liquid left when the milk curdles.

20 *push*: onslaught; thrust (of weapons).

21 *cheer*: comfort; Macbeth can still make a pun with 'chair'.

disseat: unseat, de-throne.

22 *my way of life*: the course of my life.

23 *the sere … leaf*: Compare the opening lines of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73, 'That time of year thou mayst in me behold | When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang | Upon those boughs that shake against the cold … '

sere: dry, withered.

27 *mouth-honour*: flattery, lip-service.

28 *fain*: willingly.

36 *skirr*: scour.

39 *thick-coming*: coming in rapid succession.

41 *minister to*: treat.

42 *rooted*: deeply embedded.

43 *Raze*: eradicate, root out.

written: imprinted.

44 *oblivious*: causing forgetfulness.

45 *stuff'd bosom*: burdened heart.

51 *dispatch*: hurry up.

51–2 *cast The water*: test the urine.

53 *pristine*: undefiled.

55 *Pull't off*: Macbeth speaks to the attendant, probably referring to his armour.

56 *rhubarb, cynne*: medicinal plants prescribed as emetics and purgatives.

57 *scour*: drive out.

58 *preparation*: i.e. for war.

59 *Bring it after me*: Either the piece of armour of line 55, or some further news.

60 *bane*: destruction.

63 *Profit … here*: The avarice of physicians was always a target for satire.

SCENE 4

Birnam Wood. Drum and colours. Enter Malcolm, Siward, Macduff, Siward's son, Menteith, Caithness, Angus, *and* Soldiers, *marching*

Malcolm

Cousins, I hope the days are near at hand
That chambers will be safe[2].

Menteith

We doubt it nothing.

Siward

What wood is this before us?

Menteith

The Wood of Birnam.

Malcolm

Let every soldier hew him down a bough,
And bear't before him; thereby shall we shadow[5]
The numbers of our host and make[6] discovery
Err in report of us[7].

A Soldier

It shall be done.

Siward

We learn no other[8], but the confident tyrant
Keeps still in Dunsinane and will endure
Our setting down[10] before't.

Malcolm

'Tis his main hope,
For where there is advantage to be given[11],
Both more and less[12] have given him the revolt,
And none serve with him but constrained things[13]
Whose hearts are absent too.

Macduff

Let[14] our just censures
Attend the true event[15] and put we on
Industrious soldiership.

Siward

The time approaches
That will with due decision make us know
What we shall say we have and what we owe[18];
Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate[19],
But certain issue strokes must arbitrate.
Towards which, advance the war.

[*Exeunt, marching*

Notes

Act 5 Scene 4

Malcolm's army camouflage themselves with branches from the trees of Birnam Wood.

2 *chambers … safe*: we shall be able to sleep in peace.

5 *shadow*: conceal.

6–7 *make … us*: make Macbeth's reconnaissance agents give a false report of our numbers.

8 *no other*: no other news.

10 *setting down*: laying siege, setting up camp.

11 *advantage … given*: opportunity to escape.

12 *more and less*: high and low in rank.

13 *constrained things*: constrainèd; miserable conscripts.

14–15 *Let … event*: let's leave our criticisms until the battle's over.

18 *owe*: lack, are missing.

19 *Thoughts … relate*: speculation about what will happen is based on uncertain hopes, but actual fighting ('strokes') will decide the certain outcome ('issue').

SCENE 5

Dunsinane: inside Macbeth*'s castle; enter* Macbeth, Seyton, *and* Soldiers, *with drum and colours*

Macbeth

Hang out our banners on the outward walls;
The cry is still, 'They come.' Our castle's strength
Will laugh a siege to scorn; here let them lie
Till famine and the ague[4] eat them up.
Were they not forc'd[5] with those that should be ours,
We might have met them dareful, beard to beard,
And beat them backward home.

A cry within[7] *of women*

What is that noise?

Seyton

It is the cry of women, my good lord.

Macbeth

I have almost forgot the taste of fears;
The time has been, my senses would have cool'd
To hear a night-shriek and my fell[11] of hair
Would at a dismal treatise[12] rouse and stir
As[13] life were in't. I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direness[14] familiar to my slaughterous thoughts
Cannot once start[15] me. Wherefore was that cry?

Seyton

The queen, my lord, is dead.

Macbeth

She[16] should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word[17].
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty[19] pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time[20];
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle[22],
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player[23]
That struts and frets[24] 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.

Enter a Messenger

Thou com'st to use thy tongue: thy story quickly.

Messenger

Gracious my lord,
I should report that which I say I saw[30],
But know not how to do't.

Macbeth

Well, say, sir.

Messenger

As I did stand my watch[32] upon the hill
I look'd toward Birnam and anon[33] methought
The wood began to move.

Macbeth

Liar and slave!

Messenger

Let me endure your wrath if't be not so;
Within this three mile may you see it coming.
I say, a moving grove.

Macbeth

If thou speak'st false,
Upon the next tree shall thou hang alive
Till famine cling thee[39]; if thy speech be sooth[39a],
I care not if thou dost for me as much.
I pull in resolution[41] and begin
To doubt th'equivocation[42] of the fiend[42a]
That lies like truth. 'Fear not, till Birnam Wood
Do come to Dunsinane', and now a wood

Comes toward Dunsinane. Arm, arm, and out!
If this which he avouches[46] does appear,
There is nor flying hence nor[47] tarrying[47a] here.
I 'gin to be aweary of the sun
And wish th'estate o'th'world[49] were now undone.
Ring the alarum bell! Blow wind, come wrack;
At least we'll die with harness[51] on our back.

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 5 Scene 5

When the battle is at its height, Macbeth learns that his wife has died—and that Birnam Wood is coming towards Dunsinane.

4 *ague*: disease (characterized by fever and shivering fits).

5 *forc'd*: reinforced.

7s.d. *A cry within*: Some editors/directors send Seyton to enquire about this 'cry' ('*within*' = offstage); others introduce a servant who speaks to Seyton.

11 *fell*: head, shock.

12 *dismal treatise*: frightening story.

13 *As*: as if.

14 *Direness*: horror.

15 *start*: startle, alarm.

16–17 *She … word*: At least two meanings are possible for these lines: a) 'she would have died sooner or later: such a time would inevitably have come'; b) 'she ought to have died later, when there would have been more time (for mourning)'.

19 *petty*: trivial.

20 *To … time*: until the last syllable of remembered time shall have been recorded.

22 *candle*: i.e. life.

23 *player*: actor.

24 *frets*: raves.

30 *I say I saw*: The Messenger cannot believe his eyes.

32 *watch*: guard.

33 *anon*: suddenly.

39 *cling thee*: shrivel you up.

sooth: truth, true.

41 *pull in resolution*: check my determination.

42 *equivocation*: double-dealing.

fiend: i.e. the third Apparition.

46 *avouches*: claims, affirms.

47 *nor … nor*: neither … nor.
tarrying: staying.
49 *estate o'th'world*: the order of creation.
51 *harness*: armour.

SCENE 6

Dunsinane, surrounding the castle. Drum and colours. Enter Malcolm, Siward, Macduff, *and their army, with boughs*

Malcolm

Now near enough; your leafy screens throw down
And show like those you are. You, worthy uncle,
Shall with my cousin your right noble son
Lead our first battle[4]. Worthy Macduff and we[4a]
Shall take upon's what else remains to do,
According to our order.

Siward

Fare you well.
Do we but find the tyrant's power[7] tonight,
Let us be beaten if we cannot fight.

Macduff

Make all our trumpets speak; give them all breath[9],
Those clamorous harbingers[10] of blood and death.

[*Exeunt*

Alarums continued[10a]

Notes

Act 5 Scene 6

Malcolm's army reaches Macbeth's castle: battle is commenced.

4 *battle*: army, division of an army.
we: Malcolm begins to speak in the royal plural.
7 *power*: military forces.
9 *give … breath*: blow them as hard as you can.
10 *harbingers*: officers sent ahead to make reservations (see *1*, 4, 45).
10s.d. *Alarums continued*: From this point onwards the action is continuous, and the audience must move in imagination to different parts of the battlefield.

SCENE 7

Before or inside the castle of Dunsinane: enter Macbeth

Macbeth

They have tied me to a stake[1]; I cannot fly,
But bear-like I must fight the course. What's he
That was not born of woman? Such a one
Am I to fear, or none.

Enter Young Siward

Young Siward

What is thy name?

Macbeth

Thou'lt be afraid to hear it.

Young Siward

No, though thou call'st thyself a hotter name
Than any is in hell.

Macbeth

My name's Macbeth.

Young Siward

The devil himself could not pronounce a title
More hateful to mine ear.

Macbeth

No, nor more fearful.

Young Siward

Thou liest, abhorred[11] tyrant; with my sword
I'll prove the lie thou speak'st.

Fight, and Young Siward *slain*

Macbeth

Thou wast born of woman.
But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn,
Brandish'd by man that's of a woman born.

[*Exit with* Young Siward*'s body*

Alarums. Enter Macduff

Macduff

That way the noise is. Tyrant, show thy face!
If thou be'st slain, and with no stroke of mine,
My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still[17].
I cannot strike at wretched kerns[18] whose arms
Are hir'd to bear their staves[19]; either thou[19a], Macbeth,
Or else my sword with an unbatter'd edge
I sheath again undeeded[21]. There[21a] thou shouldst be;
By this great clatter, one of greatest note
Seems bruited[23]. Let me find him, Fortune,
And more I beg not.

[*Exit*

Alarums. Enter Malcolm *and* Siward

Siward

This way, my lord; the castle's gently render'd[25].
The tyrant's people on both sides do fight;
The noble thanes do bravely in the war.
The day almost itself professes yours,
And little is to do.

Malcolm

We have met with foes
That strike beside us[30].

Siward

Enter, sir, the castle.

[*Exeunt*

Alarum

Notes

Act 5 Scene 7

Macbeth encounters Young Siward and kills him.

1 *tied … stake*: i.e. like a bear chained to a post and attacked by dogs in the so-called 'sport' of bear-baiting.

11 *abhorred*: abhorrèd.

17 *still*: for ever.

18 *kerns*: lightly-armed foot-soldiers (see *1*, 2, 13).

19 *staves*: lances.

either thou: either I fight with you.

21 *undeeded*: having done nothing.

There: that's where.

23 *bruited*: noised, reported.

25 *gently render'd*: surrendered without fuss.

30 *strike beside us*: who fight on our side.

SCENE 8

Dunsinane: enter Macbeth

Macbeth

Why should I play[1] the Roman fool and die
On mine own sword[2]? Whiles I see lives[2a], the gashes
Do better upon them.

Enter Macduff

Macduff

Turn, hell-hound, turn.

Macbeth

Of all men else I have avoided thee,
But get thee back, my soul is too much charg'd[5]
With blood of thine already.

Macduff

I have no words;
My voice is in my sword, thou bloodier villain
Than terms[8] can give thee out.

Fight. Alarum

Macbeth

Thou losest labour.
As easy mayst thou the intrenchant[9] air
With thy keen sword impress[10] as make me bleed.
Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;
I bear a charmed[12] life which must not yield
To one of woman born.

Macduff

Despair thy charm,
And let the angel[14] whom thou still hast serv'd
Tell thee, Macduff was from[15] his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd[16].

Macbeth

Accursed[17] be that tongue that tells me so,
For it hath cow'd[18] my better part of man[18a];
And be these juggling fiends no more believ'd
That palter with us in a double sense[20],
That keep[21] the word of promise to our ear
And break it to our hope[22]. I'll not fight with thee.

Macduff

Then yield thee coward,
And live to be the show and gaze[24] o'th'time.
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
Painted upon a pole[26] and underwrit,
'Here may you see the tyrant.'

Macbeth

I will not yield
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet
And to be baited[29] with the rabble's curse.
Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane
And thou oppos'd[31] being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last[32]. Before my body,
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'

[*Exeunt, fighting. Alarums*

Enter Macbeth *and* Macduff, *fighting*, *and* Macbeth *slain*

[*Exit* Macduff, *with* Macbeth*'s body*

Notes

Act 5 Scene 8

Macbeth encounters Macduff.

1–2 *play … sword*: Roman honour demanded suicide rather than surrender.
2 *lives*: living men.
5 *charg'd*: burdened.
8 *terms*: words, expressions.
9 *intrenchant*: incapable of being cut.
10 *impress*: make a mark on.
12 *charmed*: charmèd.
14 *angel*: guiding spirit, the 'genius' referred to in *3*, 1, 57–8.
15–16 *from … ripped*: delivered prematurely by Caesarean section.
17 *Accursed*: accursèd.
18 *cow'd*: depressed, disheartened.
my … of man: the greater proportion of my courage.
20 *palter … sense*: trick us with double meanings.
21–2 *keep … hope*: keep their promises as we hear them but not as we hope for them.
24 *show and gaze*: spectacular exhibit.
26 *Painted … pole*: painted on a sign hung from a pole (as in a fair or carnival).
29 *baited*: taunted.
31 *oppos'd*: opposite me.
32 *try the last*: have a final attempt.

SCENE 9

Malcolm*'s headquarters. Retreat, and flourish*[0]. *Enter with drum and colours*, Malcolm, Siward, Ross, Thanes, *and* Soldiers

Malcolm

I would the friends we miss[1] were safe arriv'd.

Siward

Some must go off[2]. And yet by these[2a] I see,
So great a day as this is cheaply bought.

Malcolm

Macduff is missing and your noble son.

Ross

Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier's debt[5];
He only liv'd but till he was a man,
The which no sooner had his prowess confirm'd
In the unshrinking station where he fought[8],
But like a man he died.

Siward

Then he is dead?

Ross

Ay, and brought off the field. Your[10] cause of sorrow
Must not be measur'd by his worth, for then
It hath no end[12].

Siward

Had he his hurts before[12a]?

Ross

Ay, on the front.

Siward

Why then, God's soldier be he;
Had I as many sons as I have hairs[15],
I would not wish them to a fairer death.
And so his knell[17] is knoll'd.

Malcolm

He's worth more sorrow,

And that I'll spend for him.

Siward

He's worth no more;
They say he parted well and paid his score[19],
And so God be with him. Here comes newer comfort.

Enter Macduff, *with* Macbeth*'s head*

Macduff

Hail, king, for so thou art. Behold where stands
Th'usurper's cursed[22] head. The time is free.
I see thee compass'd with[23] thy kingdom's pearl[23a],
That speak my salutation in their minds;
Whose voices I desire aloud with mine.
Hail, King of Scotland.

All

Hail, King of Scotland.

Flourish[26]

Malcolm

We shall not spend a large expense of time
Before we reckon[28] with your several[28a] loves
And make us even with you. My thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland
In such an honour nam'd. What's more to do
Which would be planted newly with the time[32],—
As calling home our exil'd friends abroad
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny,
Producing forth the cruel ministers
Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen,
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands[37]
Took off her life,—this and what needful else
That calls upon us[39], by the grace of Grace[39a]
We will perform in measure, time, and place.[40]
So, thanks to all at once and to each one,

Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone[42].

Flourish

[*Exeunt*

Notes

Act 5 Scene 9

Malcolm is proclaimed King.

0s.d. *flourish*: trumpet call to herald Malcolm's approach.

1 *we miss*: who are missing.

2 *go off*: be killed.

by these: judging by these men I see here.

5 *soldier's debt*: what a soldier owes—i.e. his life.

8 *the … fought*: the position where he fought without flinching.

10–12 *Your … end*: you must not measure your grief by his worth, because then it would be endless.

12 *before*: in the front of his body; see '*Macbeth*: the source', here.

15 *hairs*: the hairs on my head (a proverbial comparison); perhaps Siward makes a pun with 'heirs'.

17 *knell*: funeral bell (see *2*, 1, 63).

19 *score*: debt—see line 5.

22 *cursed*: cursèd.

23 *compass'd with*: surrounded by.

pearl: jewels—i.e. the thanes.

26s.d. *Flourish*: fanfare.

28 *reckon*: settle accounts.

several: separate, individual.

32 *would … time*: ought to be started now, just as a new age has begun; Malcolm's gardening metaphor seems to echo Duncan's words, *1*, 4, 28–9.

37 *self … hands*: her own violent hands.

39 *calls upon us*: demands our attention.

Grace: god.

40 *in measure … place*: in the correct order, at the right time, and in the proper place: Malcolm restores harmony to Scotland.

42 *Scone*: The traditional site of Scottish coronations; compare *2*, 4, 31

Macbeth: the Source

Shakespeare's main source for *Macbeth* was *The Chronicles of Scotland*, which were compiled by Raphael Holinshed in 1577. *The Chronicles* provide a complete outline of Macbeth's career, from his first meeting with the witches until his death at the hands of Macduff. Holinshed also recounts the killing of an earlier Scottish king, King Duff, who – like King Duncan in Shakespeare's play – was murdered when he was the guest of a trusted subject.

The following passages are extracts from *The Chronicles*, with modernized spelling and punctuation. Dots (…) indicate that something has been missed out. In order to make a continuous narrative, some words have been inserted and are indicated by square brackets.


The Hiſtorie of Scotlande. 239

Macbeth and Macduff

It fortuned as Macbeth and Banquo journeyed towards Forres … there met them three women in strange and wild apparel … The first of them spake and said, 'All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Glamis.' (For he had lately entered

into that dignity and office by the death of his father Sinel.) The second of them said, ‘All hail, Macbeth, Thane of Cawdor.’ But the third said ‘All hail, Macbeth, that hereafter shalt be King of Scotland.’

Then Banquo: ‘What manner of women’ (said he) ‘are you, that seem so little favourable unto me, whereas to my fellow here, besides high offices, ye assign also the Kingdom, appointing further nothing for me at all?’

‘Yes’ (says the first of them) ‘we promise greater benefits unto thee than unto him, for he shall reign indeed, but with an unlucky end; neither shall he leave any issue behind him to succeed in his place, where contrarily thou indeed shall not reign at all, but of thee those shall be born which shall govern the Scottish Kingdom by long order of continual descent.’

Herewith the aforesaid women vanished immediately out of their sight … The common opinion was that these women were either the weird sisters … or else some nymphs or fairies …

Shortly after, the Thane of Cawdor being condemned at Forres of treason against the king committed, his lands, livings and offices were given of the king’s liberality to Macbeth.

The same night after, at supper, Banquo jested with him and said, ‘Now, Macbeth, thou has obtained those things which the two former sisters prophesied, there remaineth only for thee to purchase that which the third said should come to pass.’

Whereupon Macbeth, revolving the thing in his mind, began even then to devise how he might attain to the kingdom; but yet he thought with himself that he must tarry a time, which should advance him thereto (by the divine providence) as it had come to pass in his former preferment. But shortly after it chanced that King Duncan, having two sons … he made the elder of them called Malcolm, Prince of Cumberland, as it were thereby to appoint him his successor in the kingdom immediately after his decease. Macbeth [was] sore troubled therewith [and] he began to take counsel how he might usurp the kingdom by force …

The words of the three sisters … greatly encouraged him hereunto, but specially his wife lay sore upon him to attempt the thing, as she that was very ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of queen. At length therefore … he slew the king … [and then] he caused himself to be proclaimed king, and forthwith went unto Scone, where … he received the investiture of the kingdom according to the accustomed manner.

Malcolm … and Donald Bane, the sons of King Duncan, for fear of their lives (which they might well know that Macbeth would seek to bring to an end for his more sure confirmation in the estate) fled into Cumberland, where Malcolm remained, till time that [King] Edward … received [him] by way of most friendly entertainment; but Donald passed over into Ireland where he was tenderly cherished by the king of that land …

Macbeth govern[ed] the realm for a space of ten years in equal justice … [but then] he began to show what he was … For the prick of conscience … caused him ever to fear, lest he should be served by the same cup as he had administered to his predecessor.

The words also of the three weird sisters would not out of his mind, which as they had promised him the kingdom, so likewise did they promise it at the same time unto the heirs of Banquo. He willed, therefore, the same Banquo with his son named Fleance, to come to [a] supper that he had prepared for them – which was indeed, as he had devised, present death at the hands of certain murderers. [He had hired these men] to execute that deed, appointing them to meet with that same Banquo and his son without the palace, as they returned to their lodgings, and there to slay them … it chanced yet by benefit of the dark night, that although the father were slain, the son … escaped that danger …

After the contrived slaughter of Banquo, nothing prospered with the foresaid Macbeth: for in manner every man began to doubt his own life … And even as there were many that stood in fear of him, so likewise stood he in fear of many …

[Macbeth] had learned of certain wizards … that he ought to take heed of Macduff, who in time to come should seek to destroy him. And surely hereupon had he put Macduff to death, but that a certain witch, whom he had in great trust, had told [him] that he should never be slain with man born of any woman, nor vanquished till the wood of Birnam came in[to] the castle of Dunsinane. By this prophecy Macbeth put all fear out of his heart, supposing that he might do what he would …

At length Macduff, to avoid peril of life, purposed with himself to pass into England, to procure Malcolm to claim the crown of Scotland. But this was not so secretly devised by Macduff, but that Macbeth had knowledge given him thereof … for Macbeth had in every nobleman's house one sly fellow or other in fee with him, to reveal all that was said or done within the

same … Immediately then, being advertised whereabout Macduff went, he came hastily with a great power unto Fife, and forthwith besieged the castle where Macduff dwelt, trusting to have found him therein … Macbeth most cruelly caused the wife and children of Macduff, with all other whom he found in that castle, to be slain. Also he confiscated the goods of Macduff [and] proclaimed him traitor …

But Macduff was already escaped out of danger and gotten into England … [and] at his coming unto Malcolm, he declared into what great misery the estate of Scotland was brought, by the detestable cruelties exercised by the tyrant Macbeth.

Malcolm, hearing Macduff's words … fetched a deep sigh. [Macduff urged Malcolm to return and claim the crown of Scotland, but,] though Malcolm was very sorrowful for the oppression of his countrymen the Scots, in manner as Macduff had declared, yet doubting whether he would come as one that meant unfeignedly as he spake, or else as sent from Macbeth to betray him, he thought to have some further trial, and thereupon dissembling his mind at the first, he answered as follows:

'I am truly very sorry for the misery chanced to my country of Scotland, but though I have never so great affection to relieve the same, I am nothing meet thereto. First, such immoderate lust and voluptuous sensuality … followeth me, that if I were made King of Scots, I should seek to deflower your maids and matrons, in such wise that mine intemperance should be no more importable unto you than the bloody tyranny of Macbeth now is.' Hereunto Macduff answered, 'This surely is a very evil fault, for many noble princes and kings have lost both lives and kingdoms for the same; nevertheless, there are women ennow in Scotland … '

Then said Malcolm, 'I am also the most avaricious creature on the earth, so that if I were king, I should seek so many ways to get lands and goods, that I would slay the most part of all the nobles of Scotland to the end … that I might enjoy their lands, goods, and possessions … ' Macduff to this made answer, how it was a far worse fault than the other: for avarice is the root of all mischief … 'Yet notwithstanding, follow my counsel, and take upon thee the crown. There is gold and riches enough in Scotland to satisfy thy greedy desire.'

Then said Malcolm again, 'I am further inclined to dissimulation, telling of leasings and all other kinds of deceit … Then sith there is nothing that

more becometh a prince than constancy, verity, truth, and justice, with the other laudable fellowship of those fair and noble virtues … you see how unable I am to govern any province or region … '

Then said Macduff, 'This is the worst of all, and there I leave thee, and therefore say, "Oh ye unhappy and miserable Scottishmen … ye have one cursed and wicked tyrant that now reigneth over you, without any right or title … The other, that hath the right to the crown, is … nothing worthy to enjoy it ever"' …

At the last, when he was ready to depart, Malcolm took him by the sleeve and said, 'Be of good comfort, Macduff, for I have none of these vices before remembered, but have jested with thee in this manner only to prove thy mind. For diverse times heretofore hath Macbeth sought by this manner of means to bring me into his hands … '

[Then Macduff returned to Scotland, and called the nobles of the realm to assist Malcolm to reclaim the throne.]

In the meantime, Malcolm purchased such favour at King Edward's hands, that old Siward, Earl of Northumberland, was appointed, with ten thousand men, to go with him into Scotland to support him in this enterprise for recovery of his right … After that Macbeth perceived his enemies' power to increase … he recoiled back into Fife, there purposing to abide in camp fortified at the castle of Dunsinane, and to fight with his enemies if they meant to pursue him … He had such confidence in his prophecies, that he believed that he should never be vanquished, till Birnam Wood be brought to Dunsinane, nor yet to be slain with any that should be or was born of any woman.

Malcolm, following hastily after Macbeth, came the night before the battle unto Birnam Wood, and when his army had rested a while there to refresh them, he commanded every man to get a bough of some tree or other of that wood in his hand, as big as he might bear, and to march forth therewith in such wise that on the next morrow they might come closely and without sight in this manner within view of his enemies.

On the morrow, when Macbeth beheld them coming in this sort, [he] first marvelled what the matter meant, but in the end remembered himself that the prophecy which he had heard long time before that time, of the coming of Birnam Wood to Dunsinane Castle was likely to be fulfilled. Nevertheless, he brought his men in order of battle, and exhorted them to do

valiantly. Howbeit, his enemies had scarcely cast from them their boughs when Macbeth, perceiving their numbers, betook him straight to flight …

[Macduff pursued Macbeth, who challenged him], saying, 'Thou traitor, what meaneth it that thou shouldst thus in vain follow me, that am not appointed to be slain by any creature that is born of a woman. Come on, therefore … ' But Macduff … answered (with his naked sword in his hand), saying, 'It is true, Macbeth … for I am even he that thy wizards have told thee of, who was never born of my mother, but ripped out of her womb.' Therewithal he stepped unto [Macbeth], and slew him in the place. Then cutting his head from his shoulders he set it upon a pole and brought it unto Malcolm.

Malcolm … thus recovering the realm … was crowned at Scone … Immediately after his coronation, he called a parliament … in which he rewarded them in lands and in livings that had assisted him against Macbeth … He created many earls … [and] these were the first earls that have ever been heard of amongst the Scottishmen …

Earl Siward [had] sent his son [into Scotland] with an army to conquer the land, whose hap was there to be slain. When his father heard the news he demanded whether he received the wounds whereof he died in the fore-part of his body, or in the hinder-part: and when it was told him that he received it in the fore-part, 'I rejoice' (saith he) 'even with all my heart, for I would not wish either to my son nor to my self any other kind of death.'

Donwald murders King Duff

[After some of his kinsmen had been put to death for treason, Donwald, the 'captain of the castle' at Forres], conceived such an inward malice toward the king … [and] through setting of his wife … he found means to murder the king within the aforesaid castle of Forres … For the king, being in that country, was accustomed to lie most commonly within the same castle, having special trust in Donwald, as a man whom he never suspected …

[Donwald still held a grudge against the King], which his wife, perceiving, ceased not to travail with him until she understood the cause of his displeasure. Which at length when she had learned by his own relation, she, as one that bear no less malice in her heart towards the king …

counselled him … to make him away, and showed him the means whereby he might soonest accomplish it. Donwald thus being the more kindled in wrath by the words of his wife, determined to follow her advice in the execution of so heinous an act. Whereupon devising with himself for a while, which way he might best accomplish his accursed intent, [he] at length got opportunity, and sped his purpose as followeth.

It chanced that the king, upon the day before he purposed to depart forth of the castle … called such afore him as had faithfully served him in pursuit and apprehension of the rebels; and, giving them hearty thanks, he bestowed sundry honourable gifts amongst them. Of the which number Donwald was one, as he that had been ever accounted a most faithful servant to the king.

At length … he got him into his privy chamber, only with two of his chamberlains. [These men], having brought [the king] to bed, came forth again, and then fell to banqueting with Donwald and his wife … Whereat they sat up so long, till they had charged their stomachs with such full gorges that their heads were no sooner got to the pillow, but asleep they were – so fast that a man might have removed the chamber over them, sooner than to have waked them out of their drunken sleep.

[Donwald persuaded some of his servants to murder the king and carry his body out of the castle.]

Donwald, about the time that the murder was doing, got him amongst them that kept the watch, and so continued to company with them all the residue of the night. But in the morning when the noise was raised in the king's chamber of how the king was slain … he with the watch ran thither, as though he had known nothing of the matter, and breaking into the chamber, and finding cakes of blood in the bed, and on the floor about the sides of it, he forthwith slew the chamberlains as guilty of that heinous murder …

Finally, such was his over earnest diligence in the severe inquisition and trial of the offenders herein, that some of the lords began to mislike the matter, and to smell forth shrewd tokens, that he should not be altogether clear himself …

For the space of six months together, after this heinous murder thus committed, there appeared no sun by day, nor moon by night in any part of the realm, but still was the sky covered in continual clouds, and sometimes

such outrageous winds arose, with lightnings and tempests, that the people were in great fear of present destruction …

Monstrous sights also that were seen in the Scottish kingdom that year were these: horses in Lothian, being of singular beauty and swiftness, did eat their own flesh … there was also a sparhawk strangled by an owl …

Songs from The Witch by Thomas Middleton

The play must have been revised or adapted at some time before publication of the Folio edition in 1623, as this edition gives additional opportunities and songs to the Witches (whose numbers were increased for the entertainment).

1 **Act III, Scene v, line 33**

Sing within

First Witch Come away Heccat, Heccat, Oh, come away.
Second Witch I come, I come, with all the speed I may,
I come, I come, with all the speed I may.
First Witch Where's Stadling?
Third Witch Here.
First Witch Where's Puckle?
Fourth Witch Here, and Hopper too, and Helway too.
First Witch We want but you, we want but you.
Come away, make up the count,
I will but noint, and then I mount.
I will, &c.
First Witch Here comes one, it is
To fetch his due, a kiss,
Ay, a cull, sip of blood;
And why thou stayst so long, I muse,
Since the air's so sweet and good.
Oh art thou come! What news?
Second Witch All goes fair for our delight,
Either come, or else refuse.
Now I am furnished for the flight,
Now I go, now I fly.
Malkin my sweet spirit and I.
Third Witch Oh what a dainty pleasure's this,
To sail i'th'air,

While the moon shines fair,
To sing, to toy and kiss,
Over woods, high rocks and mountains,
Over misty hills and fountains,
Chorus Over steeples, towers and turrets,
We fly by night 'mongst troops of spirits.
No ring of bells to our ears sounds,
No howls of wolves, nor yelp of hounds,
No, nor the noise of waters breach,
Nor cannons' throats our height can reach.

Notes

noint: anoint myself

cull: embrace

toy: play

breach: breaking

2 Act IV, Scene i, line 43

Black spirits, and white; red spirits, and gray,
Mingle, mingle, mingle; you that mingle may.
Titty, Tiffin, keep it stiff in.
Fire-Drake, Pucky, make it lucky.
Liand, Robin, you must bob in.
Round, a-round, a-round, about, about
All ill come running in, all good keep out.

First Witch Here's the blood of a bat.
Hecate Put in that; oh put in that.
Second Witch Here's libbard's bane.
Hecate Put in again.
First Witch The juice of toad, the oil of adder.
Second Witch That will make the younker madder.
Hecate Put in: there's all, and rid the stench.
Firestone Nay, here's three ounces of the red-haired wench.
All Round: around, around, &c.

Notes

libbard: leopard
younker: fellow

Background

England in 1606

When Shakespeare was writing *Macbeth*, many people still believed that the sun went round the earth. They were taught that this was the way God had ordered things, and that – in England – God had founded a Church and appointed a Monarchy so that the land and people could be well governed.

'The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there.'

L. P. Hartley

Government

For most of Shakespeare's life, the reigning monarch of England was Queen Elizabeth I; when she died, she was succeeded by King James I. He was also king of Scotland (James VI), and so the two kingdoms were united in 1603 after Elizabeth's death. With his counsellors and ministers, James governed the nation from London, although not more than half a million people out of a total population of six million lived in the capital city. In the rest of the country, law and order were maintained by the land-owners and enforced by their deputies. It was a period of high inflation, when political and social unease resulted in constant threats to the king and the establishment, and when poverty was widespread. The average man had no vote – and women had no rights at all.

Religion

At this time, England was a Christian country. All children were baptized, soon after they were born, into the Church of England; they were taught the essentials of the Christian faith, and instructed in their duty to God and to humankind.

Marriages and funerals were conducted only by the licensed clergy and

according to the Church's rites and ceremonies. Attending divine service was compulsory; absences (without a good – medical – reason) could be punished by fines. In this way, the authorities were able to keep some control over the population: recording births, marriages, and deaths; being alert to anyone who refused to accept standard religious practices, who could be politically dangerous; and ensuring that people received the approved teachings through the official 'Homilies' which were regularly preached in all parish churches.

Elizabeth I's father, Henry VIII, had broken away from the Church of Rome, and from that time all people in England were able to hear the church services *in their own language* rather than in Latin. The Book of Common Prayer was used in every church, and an English translation of the Bible was read aloud in public. The Christian religion had never been so well taught before!

Education

School education reinforced the Church's teaching. From the age of four, boys could attend the 'petty school' (it came from the French '*petite école*') to learn reading and writing along with a few prayers; some schools also included work with numbers. At the age of seven, a boy was ready for the grammar school (if his father was willing and able to pay the fees).

Grammar schools taught Latin grammar, translation work and the study of Roman authors, paying attention as much to style as to content. The art of fine writing was therefore important from early youth. A very few students went on to university; these were either clever boys who won scholarships, or else the sons of rich noblemen. Girls stayed at home, and learned domestic and social skills – cooking, sewing, perhaps even music. The lucky ones might learn to read and write.

Language

At the start of the sixteenth century the English had a very poor opinion of their own language: there was little serious writing in English, and hardly any literature. Latin was the language of international scholarship, and the eloquence of the Romans' style was much admired. Many translations from Latin were made, and in this way writers increased the vocabulary of

English and made its grammar more flexible. French, Italian, and Spanish works were also translated and – for the first time – there were English versions of the Bible.

By the end of the century, English was a language to be proud of: it was rich in vocabulary, capable of infinite variety and subtlety, and ready for all kinds of word-play – especially *puns*, for which Shakespeare's English is renowned.

Drama

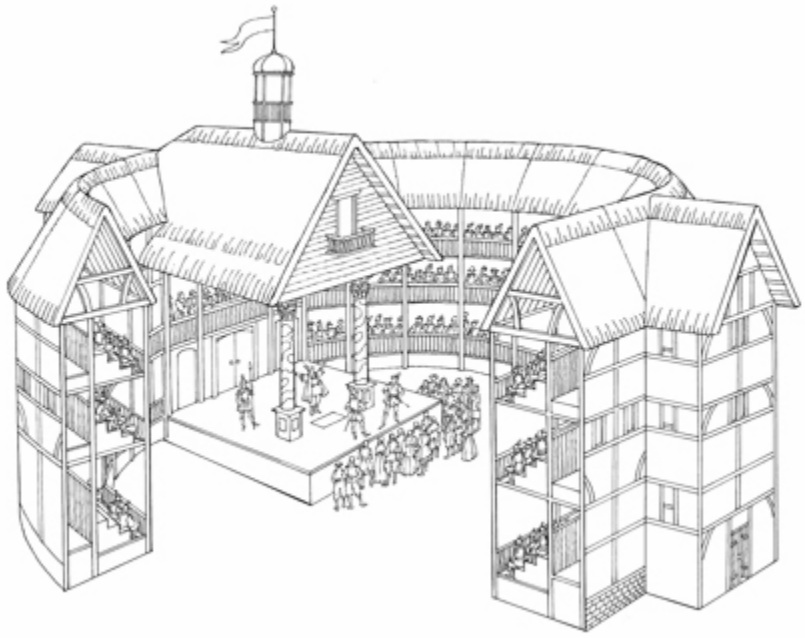
The great art-form of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age was its drama. The Elizabethans inherited a tradition of play-acting from the Middle Ages, and they reinforced this by reading and translating the Roman playwrights. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, plays were performed by groups of actors. These were all-male companies (boys acted the female roles) who travelled from town to town, setting up their stages in open places (such as inn-yards) or, with the permission of the owner, in the hall of some noble house. The touring companies continued outside London into the seventeenth century; but in London, in 1576, a new building was erected for the performance of plays. This was the Theatre, the first purpose-built playhouse in England. Other playhouses followed, including the Globe, where most of Shakespeare's plays were performed and the English drama reached new heights.

There were people who disapproved, of course. The theatres, which brought large crowds together, could encourage the spread of disease – and dangerous ideas. During the summer, when the plague was at its worst, the playhouses were closed. A constant censorship was imposed, more or less severe at different times. The Puritans, a religious and political faction who wanted to impose strict rules of behaviour, tried to close down the theatres. However, partly because the royal family favoured drama, and partly because the buildings were outside the city limits, they did not succeed until 1642.

Theatre

From contemporary comments and sketches – most particularly a drawing by a Dutch visitor, Johannes de Witt – it is possible to form some idea of

the typical Elizabethan playhouse for which most of Shakespeare's plays were written. Hexagonal (six-sided) in shape, it had three roofed galleries encircling an open courtyard. The plain, high stage projected into the yard, where it was surrounded by the audience of standing 'groundlings'. At the back were two doors for the actors' entrances and exits; and above these doors was a balcony – useful for a musicians' gallery or for the acting of scenes '*above*'. Over the stage was a thatched roof, supported on two pillars, forming a canopy – which seems to have been painted with the sun, moon, and stars for the 'heavens'.



Underneath was space (concealed by curtains) which could be used by characters ascending and descending through a trap-door in the stage. Costumes and properties were kept backstage, in the 'tiring house'. The actors used the most luxurious costumes they could find, often clothes given to them by rich patrons. Stage properties were important for showing where a scene was set, but the dramatist's own words were needed to explain the time of day, since all performances took place in the early afternoon.

A replica of Shakespeare's own theatre, the Globe, has been built in London, and stands in Southwark, almost exactly on the Bankside site of the original.

Scotland in the Time of Macbeth

Eleventh-century Scotland

Scotland in the eleventh century was an exciting place of live as the country was in a state of constant change. However, it was a treacherous place, too. Warring families and clans battled to control land and trade. Each side was led by a thane, whose castle became an important power base. Murder was committed frequently, particularly for political reasons, and revenge killings were common.

The government was primitive and consisted of the king and his immediate council, which included both warlords and church leaders. These men would agree on policy and try to put it into practice, but communication and movement were made difficult by the combination of lochs and mountains, moors and bogs.

The real Macbeth

The real Macbeth was born in around 1005, into a powerful family that ruled the Scottish lands of Moray and Ross. It was a violent time and battles for power were commonplace, even within families and clans. Macbeth's own father was murdered by his cousins.

Macbeth was in a strong position for the crown. He was descended from Malcolm II (Macbeth's grandfather) and married Gruach, granddaughter to a High King of Scotland. He became Mormaer ('great steward') of Moray, a

position of almost royal authority.

At about this time, Duncan was king of the part of Scotland that is the modern Strathclyde. It is said that Macbeth resented Duncan's position – as grandson of Malcolm ii, Macbeth was expected to become king through the rules of tanistry (see below) – and that Duncan's rule was regarded as ineffectual and unpopular. Macbeth took Duncan's throne by force and was elected High King of Scotland in around 1040.

Succession

In England, at the time of Macbeth, succession to the royal throne followed the law of primogeniture – where property and position are passed down from father to eldest son.

Scotland did not adopt the system of primogeniture until the twelfth century and the reign of Malcolm iii Canmore, who succeeded Macbeth to the throne. Until this time, Scottish kings ascended to the throne according to the system of tanistry.

Tanistry is where the throne is passed not through the father, but through the mother. This meant, for example, that the heir – called the 'tanist' – might be the son of the reigning king's sister instead of the eldest son of the king himself. The tanist had to be of age and healthy to become king, and, when he did, he would rule for life. Tanistry was replaced by primogeniture during the reign of James I (1406–37).

It is clear from Holinshed's *Chronicles* that Scotland began to abandon the system of tanistry during the reigns of Duncan, Macbeth and Malcolm ii. In Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Duncan introduces a new kind of system for succession by announcing that Malcolm is to be his heir. This falls somewhere between tanistry and primogeniture, showing the change in progress.

Scotland in 1606

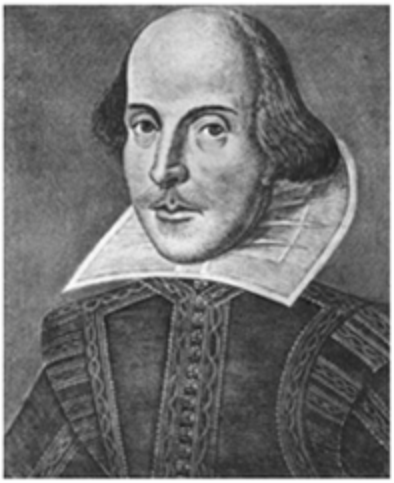
In 1603, Queen Elizabeth i of England died. She was succeeded to the throne by King James vi of Scotland and i of England.

King James had already proved himself a successful monarch and hoped that his succession to the English throne would bring England and Scotland closer together. Unfortunately, his succession – known as the Union of the

Crowns – was unpopular with many Scots, who considered it disastrous to have two parliaments (the English and the Scottish) ruled by a single sovereign. The English were not happy either: they did not like the idea of England being under the rule of a Scottish king.

In 1606 – when *Macbeth* was first performed – things were not easy for King James. During his first few years on the English throne, James had been faced with a variety of challenges, including the ongoing argument between Puritans and Catholics in Scotland and the Gunpowder Plot in England. This discontent later led to the abandonment of his plans for a Union of Great Britain, an idea that proved unpopular on all sides.

William Shakespeare, 1564–1616



Elizabeth I was Queen of England when Shakespeare was born in 1564. He was the son of a tradesman who made and sold gloves in the small town of Stratford-upon-Avon, and he was educated at the grammar school in that town. Shakespeare did not go to university when he left school, but worked, perhaps, in his father's business. When he was eighteen he married Anne Hathaway, who became the mother of his daughter, Susanna, in 1583, and of twins in 1585.

There is nothing exciting, or even unusual, in this story; and from 1585 until 1592 there are no documents that can tell us anything at all about Shakespeare. But we have learned that in 1592 he was known in London, and that he had become both an actor and a playwright.

We do not know when Shakespeare wrote his first play, and we are not sure of the order in which he wrote his works. If you look here at the list of his writings and their approximate dates, you will see he started by writing plays on subjects taken from the history of England. No doubt this was partly because he was patriotic and interested in English history but he was also a very shrewd businessman. He could see that the theatre audiences enjoyed being shown their own history, and it was certain that he would make a profit from this kind of drama.

He also wrote comedies, with romantic love-stories of young people who fall in love with one another, and at the end of the play marry and live happily ever after.

At the end of the sixteenth century Shakespeare wrote some melancholy, bitter, and tragic plays. This change may have been caused by some sadness in the writer's life (his only son died in 1596). Shakespeare, however, was not the only writer whose works at this time were very serious. The whole of England was facing a crisis. Queen Elizabeth I was growing old. She was greatly loved, and the people were sad to think she must soon die; they were also afraid, because the queen had never married, and so there was no child to succeed her.

When James I, Elizabeth's Scottish cousin, came to the throne in 1603, Shakespeare continued to write serious drama – the great tragedies and the plays based on Roman history (such as *Julius Caesar*) for which he is most famous. Finally, before he retired from the theatre, he wrote another set of comedies. These all have the same theme: they tell of happiness which is lost, and then found again.

Shakespeare returned from London to Stratford, his home town. He was rich and successful, and he owned one of the biggest houses in the town. He died in 1616.

Shakespeare also wrote two long poems, and a collection of sonnets. The sonnets describe two love affairs, but we do not know who the lovers were – or whether they existed only in Shakespeare's imagination. Although there are many public documents concerned with his career as a writer and a businessman, Shakespeare has hidden his personal life from us. A nineteenth-century poet, Matthew Arnold, addressed Shakespeare in a poem, and wrote 'We ask and ask – Thou smilest, and art still'.

Approximate Dates of Composition of Shakespeare's Works

Period	Comedies	History plays	Tragedies	Poems
I	Comedy of Errors	Henry VI, part 1	Titus Andronicus	
	Taming of the Shrew	Henry VI, part 2		
before 1594	Two Gentlemen of Verona	Henry VI, part 3		
	Love's Labour's Lost	Richard III		Venus and Adonis
				Rape of Lucrece
II	Midsummer Night's Dream	Richard II	Romeo and Juliet	
	Merchant of Venice	King John		
1594 – 1599	Merry Wives of Windsor	Henry IV, part 1		
	Much Ado About Nothing	Henry IV, part 2		
	As You Like It	Henry		Sonnets
III	Twelfth Night		Julius Caesar	
	Troilus and Cressida		Hamlet	
1599 – 1608	Measure for Measure		Othello	
	All's Well That Ends Well		Timon of Athens	
	Pericles		King Lear	
			Macbeth	
			Antony and Cleopatra	
			Coriolanus	
IV	Cymbeline			
1608 – 1613	The Winter's Tale			
	The Tempest	Henry VIII		

Exploring Macbeth in the Classroom

Feared in the theatre as the harbinger of ill luck, Macbeth, or 'the Scottish play', is a favourite play for studying at all stages in schools. Younger students like to dabble in rhymes and spells, whilst older ones enjoy the unravelling of a bloodthirsty tale of murder and intrigue.

This section suggests a range of approaches in the classroom, to engender both enjoyment and understanding of the play.

Ways into the Play

Students may feel an antipathy towards the study of Shakespeare. The imaginative and enthusiastic teacher, with the help of this edition of the play, will soon break this down!

Navigating the play

If this is the first time your students have looked at a whole Shakespeare play, or at this particular edition, give them some practice at finding their way around. After explaining the division into acts, scenes and lines, challenge them to look up some references as quickly as possible. Below are some suggestions which might lead on to further discussion of the plot.

Act I, Scene iii, lines 143–4	*(If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me* *Without my stir.)*
Act II, Scene i, lines 33–4	*(Is this a dagger which I see before me, The handle toward my hand?)*
Act IV, Scene i, lines 78–80	*(Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn* *The power of man, for none of woman born* *Shall harm Macbeth.)*

Improvisation

Working on one of these improvisations may help students access some of the ideas behind the drama.

a) Two friends go to see a fortune-teller for fun. There seems to be really good news for one of them – but is it good news? Could there be an alternative meaning? Improvise the situation.

b) A young ambitious couple – Chris and Sam – are discussing jobs. Chris has the chance for a big promotion, but he/she has to do something underhand in order to achieve it. Sam encourages Chris to go for it, but Sam doesn't want to. Improvise the conversation.

c) Improvise a scene in which three witches or mysterious characters are plotting a meeting. Try to make the scene weird, sinister and threatening.

Setting the Scene

A tragedy

Macbeth is one Shakespeare's great tragedy plays. Discuss the meaning of the word tragedy and what your students will expect to find in such a play. Does tragedy feature in modern day books, films and dramas?

Old and new

The continuing popularity of Macbeth is due, to a great extent, to the durable nature of themes such as ambition, power and betrayal. Nevertheless, you will need to help bridge the divide of 400 years since the play was written. In particular, students will need to be given more information on:

- the importance of the king (who ruled by divine right)
- the belief in the power of witches
- the lack of power accorded to women in their own right.

Students will also benefit from some exploration of the conventions of Elizabethan theatre.

Put together a ‘true or false’ quiz, to see how much they know already. Use statements such as:

- The people of Scotland voted for their king. (False)
- People believed that witches had ‘familiars’, the devil in the shape of an animal like a cat. (True)
- All the parts in the play were played by men and boys. (True)

Ask students to do a little research for homework (see *Introduction* and *Further Reading and Resources*) and compile their own ‘true or false’ quiz to put to the rest of the class.

Keeping Track of the Action

It’s important to give students opportunities to ‘digest’ and reflect upon their reading, so that they may take ownership of the play.

Reading journal

As you read through the play, help your students to trace and understand the plot by asking them to keep a journal in which they record what happens. They can also record their reactions and thoughts about the action and the characters. Their responses can remain focused through specific questions (from the teacher) to answer. As part of their journal they can keep a timeline which charts the main events of the drama.

Storyboarding

Cartoon strip versions of scenes can be helpful for younger students in particular. Give them an example of how to sum up the action, in pictures, captions (explaining what is happening) and speech/thought bubbles (for key words and lines) and then ask them to complete their own storyboard for the scene being studied.

Sequencing and cloze

You can test students’ grasp of key parts of the action by summarizing the plot in a number of sentences, jumbling the sentences and asking your

students to place them in the correct sequence. Alternatively, give a modern English summary of a scene studied, leaving key words/characters' names blank, and ask students to complete the blanks.

Film versions

There are many film versions of *Macbeth* and these can be a helpful and illuminating way of making the play accessible to students. Exploring different interpretations and treatments can give real insight into the play. Students may be able to develop this into a piece of coursework that examines a director's interpretation of the play (or part of the play).

Characters

Students of all ages need to come to an understanding of the characters: their motivations, their relationships and their development.

Casting director

Ask your students to cast the parts for a new film version of *Macbeth*. First, they will need to give the characters a profile, containing information about them (known and surmised). Next, they must make a report on which actors they are going to invite to take the parts, and why. Finally, they should give each actor important information about their character, and suggestions on how to play the part.

Thought tracking

This is an excellent way of encouraging students to explore the inner thoughts and motivations of a character. Select a scene where the characters' words have hidden meaning, irony or layers of meaning. Ask students to consider and write down the thoughts behind each character's words. Suitable scenes include:

Act I, Scene iii, lines 36ff	(the witches' first prophecies)
Act III, Scene i, lines 11–45	(Macbeth and Banquo)

Act III, Scene ii	(Macbeth and Lady Macbeth)
Act III, Scene iv, lines 33ff	(the feast and Banquo's ghost)

Diaries, letters and reports

Giving your students the opportunity to write and think as one of the characters presents them with a new and illuminating perspective on the character(s). Here are some possible scenarios:

a) After the murder of Duncan, Lady Macbeth's influence on Macbeth wanes and she can longer communicate with him. Ask your students to imagine she writes a letter to her husband, attempting to bring them back together.
b) Macbeth, in Act IV, Scene i, returns to the witches to find out more about his fate. Writing his diary entry after this visit should reveal more about his wretched state.
c) Ask your students to write the Doctor's report on the health of Lady Macbeth (Act V, Scene i).

Themes

There are many themes and ideas running through the play, including fate, loyalty, ambition and good versus evil. Here are just a few ways to explore them.

Pairs of opposites

Encourage your students to explore the opposite ideas that abound in the play, by pairing them up, allocating them a pair of opposites, then asking them to find evidence of their opposite in the play. Suitable opposites include: good/evil; loyalty/betrayal; honesty/dishonesty; bravery/cowardice; order/disorder.

Theme collage

Give students a theme from the play (e.g. kingship, ambition, the supernatural) and ask them to create a pictorial representation of this theme

in the modern world, using pictures, photographs and colours. An important part of the collage should be words and quotations from *Macbeth*.

Charts and graphs

These can be a good way of analysing and exploring ideas, feelings or developments in a visual way. Using a bar chart or line graph, students can chart developments at particular moments in the play. For example:

a) a line graph to chart the rising tension and Macbeth's anxiety leading up to the murder of Duncan
b) a graph to show the growing insanity of Macbeth and/or Lady Macbeth
c) Macbeth's 'fate line', showing the main events, the opportunities he had to alter course, and the points of no return.

Shakespeare's Language

Macbeth is a sinister, violent drama, full of fear, evil and death. The language of the play creates this dark drama. It is full of memorable and evocative images: 'look like th'innocent flower, but be the serpent under't'; 'Yet do I fear thy nature, It is too full o'th'milk of human kindness…'; 'Out, out brief candle'.

Brave Macbeth

Focus on the introduction to Macbeth and how he is described before we see him on stage. The Captain's account of the battle in Act I, Scene ii is graphically reported and students will be able to find strong images and figures of speech in the language. Discuss with students the effects of the words, what they tell us about Macbeth and why the battle is reported in such graphic detail.

Witches and spells

Look at the predominant rhythm and rhyme of the words spoken by the witches (for example, Act IV, Scene i). Discuss why they have their own way of speaking – the power it gives, the effect on the audience, etc. Look

in more detail at the charm at the beginning of Act IV, including the use of rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and onomatopoeia, and challenge the students to create their own verses to add to the charm.

Words of persuasion

Lady Macbeth's crucial role is to persuade the unwilling Macbeth to commit himself to murder. Analyse the words with which she does this in Act I, Scene vii, lines 32-79: the powerful images, rhetorical devices, emotive language and the carefully constructed argument. It is a masterpiece of persuasion.

Exploring with Drama

Book the hall or push back the desks, because the best way to study a great play is through drama. Students of all ages will benefit from a dramatic encounter with *Macbeth*. They will enjoy the opportunity to act out a scene or two, or to explore the situations through improvisation, for example, putting a character in the 'hot seat' for questioning by others.

Tableaux

Ask your students to create a tableau, in groups, which contains all the main characters from the play (e.g. Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, the witches, Banquo, Duncan, et al.) The positions of the characters should say something about their relationships and position within the play. Bring the tableaux briefly to life by having each person say something in character.

The witches

Explain that the opening scene to a play is crucial and discuss Shakespeare's probable intentions with this scene in *Macbeth*. Ask groups to act it out, making it as threatening, weird or unsettling as they can.

Banquo's ghost

Explain the dilemma for a director in this scene – whether to have a ghost

or not. Ask your students to act out the scene with a ghost and without. Discuss what is gained and lost in both versions, and what may be the impact on the audience of each version.

Writing about *Macbeth*

If your students have to write about Macbeth for coursework or for examinations, you may wish to give them this general guidance:

- Read the question or task carefully, highlight the key words and answer all parts of the question.
- Planning is essential. Plan what will be in each paragraph. You can change your plan if necessary.
- Avoid retelling the story.
- *Macbeth* is a play – so consider the impact or effect on the audience.
- Use the Point, Evidence, Explanation (PEE) structure to explain points.
- Adding Evaluation (PEEE!) will gain you higher marks.
- Keep quotations short.
- Avoid referring to a film version of Macbeth, unless this is part of your task.

Further Reading and Resources

General

Fantasia, Louis, *Instant Shakespeare: a practical guide for actors, directors and teachers* (A & C Black, 2002).

Greer, Germaine, *Shakespeare A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2002).

Hall, Peter, *Shakespeare's Advice to the Players* (Oberon Books, 2003).

Holden, Anthony, *Shakespeare: his life and work* (Abacus, 2002).

McConnell, Louise, *Exit, pursued by a bear – Shakespeare's characters, plays, poems, history and stagecraft* (Bloomsbury, 2003).

McLeish and Unwin, *A Pocket Guide to Shakespeare's Plays* (Faber and Faber, 1998).

Wood, Michael, *In Search of Shakespeare* (BBC, 2003).

Children's/Students' Books

Carpenter, Humphrey, *Shakespeare Without the Boring Bits* (Viking, 1994).

Ganeri, Anita, *What they don't tell you about Shakespeare* (Hodder, 1996).

Garfield, Leon, *Shakespeare Stories* (Puffin 1997).

Garfield, Leon, *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* (Egmont, 2002).

McCaughrean, Geraldine, *Stories from Shakespeare* (Orion, 1997).

Williams, Marcia, *Mr William Shakespeare's Plays* (Walker, 2000).

Websites

Elizabethan pronunciation

Including information on insults.

http://www.renfaire.com/Language/index.html

The Royal Shakespeare Company website

As well as information on the theatre company, there are resources on the plays and the life and times of Shakespeare.

http://www.rsc.org.uk

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
Information on his works, life and times.
http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/home

Shakespeare's Globe
Information on the Globe Theatre, London.
http://www.shakespearesglobe.com

Shakespeare High
A Shakespeare classroom on the Internet.
http://www.shakespearehigh.com/

Shakespeare Illustrated
An excellent source of paintings and pictures based on Shakespeare's plays.
http://shakespeare.emory.edu/illustrated_index.cfm

Spark Notes: Macbeth
An online study guide.
http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/macbeth

Film, Video, DVD and Audio

Macbeth
Directed by Orson Welles (1948)
Starring Orson Welles, Roddy McDowall

Macbeth
Directed by Roman Polanski (1971)
Starring Jon Finch, Francesca Annis

Macbeth
Directed by Philip Casson for the Royal Shakespeare Company (1978)
Starring Ian McKellen, Judi Dench

Macbeth
Directed by Jeremy Freeston (1996)
Starring Helen Baxendale, Jason Connery

Macbeth
Directed by Gregory Doran for the Royal Shakespeare Company (2001)
Starring Antony Sher, Harriet Walter

Macbeth
BBC Shakespeare Collection

BBC Radio Shakespeare: *Macbeth*
Directed by Richard Eyre
Starring Ken Stott, Phyllis Logan

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales
Macbeth
BBC (30-minute animated film)

Macbeth for the modern age
Directed by Steve Orme for the Big Adventure Company
(30-minute performance for schools)

Shakespeare Shorts: *Macbeth*
BBC English File (video pack)

Macbeth
Channel 4 Middle English
Starring Greta Scaachi, Sean Pertwee