

## Introduction

Classical Drama or Elizabethan drama is a reference to the plays written during the glorious and golden age of queen Elizabeth and James I of Scotland.

Most prominent writers are William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson

### **Tragedy and Comedy: -**

- Elements in a tragedy:

a .tragic flaw: a defect in the protagonist' s character which brings about his or her downfall; In the case of Macbeth the flaw in the character of Macbeth is excessive ambition; the protagonist experiences what critics call a fall from grace. .

b movement from order and harmony to chaos and disorder

c. Sad unhappy end for the protagonist (often death or suicide).

- Elements in a comedy: in contrast to the concept of tragedy, comedies begin with:

a A sense of disorder and anarchy (a problem or a dilemma to be resolved)

b. A happy end for the lovers (a reunion or marriage)`

c. Humor and fun by the use of disguise and mistaken identities

The Choice of Shakespeare:

- The greatest play wright ever, if not of all time. No other writer before or after him has contributed to the English language as Shakespeare; many words have been coined by him and many sayings and dictums are attributed to Shakespeare.

Macbeth or the Scottish play: Shakespeare wrote it:

- to please and flatter king James I.

-to warn him against plotters and schemers (the Guy fawkes plot )

A word of reassurance: most of us approach Shakespeare with a sense of fear and anxiety thinking that he is difficult to read because of the unattainable language he uses in his plays. That's true to some extent , but students should bear in mind that that we don't need to understand every single word of his plays; we should try to look for the meaning; furthermore students can always have recourse to modern translations of Shakespeare s plays such as The Sparks notes ( no fear Shakespeare). I would be using the original version in my analysis and would advise you to resort to the modern version only when you get stuck.

A note about the title or the Scottish play: Shakespeare took it from a history book called Holinshed s chronicles. The reasons why Shakespeare chose to write about this Scottish king is that when Queen Elizabeth died England faced the problem of succession because

Elizabeth died a spinster and there was no heir to succeed her to the throne. The only eligible successor was king James 1 of Scotland. Shakespeare 's acting company was financially supported and protected by king James; as a matter of fact they were called the king's men. Shakespeare wrote this play to please king James.

Major themes:

- .Tyranny as a mode of government and its impacts on the rulers and the ruled.
- Unchecked or excessive ambition
- Treason and disloyalties during the Elizabethan age.
- Regicide and its impact on individuals and nature.
- The conflict between appearances and reality or truth and falsehood.
- The psychological effects of guilt.
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**A general overview of the play Macbeth.**

In this lecture, I will talk about 3 things: the plot, the political context and the major themes.

Let's begin with the plot. First, the word plot in literature refers to the major events in the story or play. In this lecture, I will not dwell on every single detail; I will focus on only those occurrences or events which have a significant impact on the main characters. The play opens with the weird sisters or the witches having a small conversation on the heath, which is a kind of wild place

They are talking about a character called Macbeth whom they are going to meet. When they meet him they hail him as the Thane Of Cawdor and make a prophecy or prediction that he will be king; this comes as a surprise to him because the title Thane of Cawdor is still in the hands Of another noble man whom Macbeth has defeated and the current king whom Macbeth serves and fights for is still alive. Therefore Macbeth does not take the witche's prophecies very seriously. As he and his best friend Banquo leave the witches, they meet another nobleman called Ross who announces to him the good news that he has been promoted to the position of Thane Of Cawdor and that the former holder of this title ( the traitor to the king) is going to be put to death for treason. This promotion has been conferred on Macbeth for his bravery and victory in the battlefield and loyalty to King Duncan. This is a key moment because this news stirs some evil thoughts in Macbeth's mind: if he wants to be King, he has got to find a way to get rid of Duncan. He sends a letter to his wife Lady Macbeth telling her about those prophecies; she is thrilled by the news and she is very ambitious and keen on devising a plan or a scheme to murder king Duncan and she and her husband Macbeth become the rulers of Scotland. There is a

lot of debate and conversation between them as to whether it's morally right to kill the current king. Through her art of manipulation, Lady Macbeth manages to convince her husband.

To reward Macbeth for his bravery and valour, king Duncan decides to have a dinner banquet in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth 's castle; the poor king Duncan doesn't know that by spending the night in their castle, he is sowing the seeds of his own destruction. After Macbeth commits the murdering of King Duncan, he doesn't stop there because he starts thinking that maybe what he has done might happen to him. Therefore he decides to consolidate his power by getting rid of all those around him and who might constitute a threat to his crown. He is afraid of his best friend Banquo (especially bearing In mind that the witches have also promised Banquo that his children will be kings. As a result Macbeth hires some murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance who manages to escape. After killing Banquo, Macbeth moves on the second step which is the elimination of another noble man called Macduff (especially bearing in mind that the witches have also warned Macbeth to be aware of his threat).

Ultimately he manages to kill Banquo but Macduff manages to flee to England to join king Duncan's son Malcolm who is the rightful heir to king Duncan. With the approval and consent of the English king, Malcolm and Macduff decide to form an alliance and wage war against the tyrant Macbeth and take the throne from him.

All of the conversation between Malcolm and Macduff takes place in England. As we move back to Scotland, we learn that Macbeth and his wife are descending into insanity and madness because of their guilt. Lady Macbeth can't sleep anymore and spends all nights sleep walking and talking about how her little hands have been stained by king Duncan's blood. She eventually commits suicide. As for Macbeth he has gone so far and deep into the path of bloodshed that he has lost his humanity and become unfeeling towards others. We can also say he has become a paranoia victim because he thinks that everybody is against him; therefore he decides to continue killing people (especially bearing in mind that the witches have told him he is invincible, that is to say, nobody can defeat him. All he cares about now in his lust of power.

In the last battle of the play Macbeth faces Macduff, believing that he will be victorious since the witches have told him no man born of a woman will kill him. The witches prophecy turns out to be misleading because we learn that Macduff was not born of a woman; he was cut off his mother's womb by a caesarean operation. The play ends in Macbeth's defeat and Malcolm, the rightful king is crowned and order is installed.

A few notes about the political and religious context

Macbeth isn't an original story; Shakespeare has taken it from a history book about Scotland. There are actually some differences between the original and Shakespeare. In the original king Duncan is a bad king whereas in Shakespeare s play king Duncan is presented as a virtuous generous king. The second difference is that in the original

version is that Macbeth is a good guy whereas in Shakespeare's play Macbeth is presented as a villain, an evil doer.

The political context: A few years before Shakespeare wrote the play, England had witnessed the death of queen Elizabeth who never married and therefore didn't leave any direct successor to the throne; the only one next in line of heritage was king James of Scotland who was the closest relative to queen Elizabeth and therefore had all the legitimate rights to the English crown. During his reign, Shakespeare's acting company was under his patronage. So in order to flatter and please king James, Shakespeare wrote this play Macbeth (sometimes it's called the Scottish play because it's all about Scottish heroes and history) .It's a kind of gift or present to king James. Shakespeare also included witchcraft in this play because king James was very interested in this subject; as a matter of fact king James wrote a book about this subject of witchcraft. The final thing to remember is that Shakespeare wanted to warn his patron king James against all traitors around him; especially bearing in mind that during his reign some enemies of king James attempted to blow up the parliament while king James was expected to have a meeting with the parliamentarians. Luckily, the plot and the conspiracy were foiled. So the play is a kind of warning about the dangers of blind trust. Dear students this is all for today. I will talk next time about the major themes using different quotes to illustrate and clarify things. I also urge to send me your questions, if any, and I will be more than happy to answer them. Take care and thanks for understanding.

### **An analysis of Macbeth, Act One**

**Scene 1.** Begins with a threatening, inhospitable environment: thunder and lightning which foreshadow some evil coming; as a matter of fact Macbeth is labeled Shakespeare's darkest play. This dark and bleak atmosphere is reinforced by the entrance of the witches. The place of their meeting is a heath, a wild place. The language they speak is confusing and foggy (fair is foul, and foul is fair) (the battle is lost and won). These statements are very equivocal and paradoxical because they contain both truths and untruths). It's this kind of unclear and deceptive language that will ultimately lead Macbeth to believe in their deceitful prophecies. The meaning of these two famous quotes is that what looks to be fair may be foul( bad) and the battle can be lost and won at the same time in the sense that in any sort of battle, there is a winner and a loser. The theme of appearance vs reality is already introduced here; it's a very important theme and we will elaborate on it. The second important thing in this scene is that the witches are talking about meeting Macbeth; this begs the question: what is the link between the witches and Macbeth?

**Scene 2:** we have a detailed description of the battle which Macbeth won against the enemies of his king Duncan; the Norwegian army, in alliance with the traitor Thane of Cawdor, have tried to overthrow king Duncan, but thanks to the bravery of Macbeth and Banquo, the Norwegian army and the rebels in the north are defeated. In this scene we

have a vivid description of Macbeth's bravery and courage; Macbeth here is portrayed as a merciless warrior; we are told how smoke issued from the blade of his sword (line 18) and how he chopped the body of his enemy into two halves (lines :22,23). Being so fascinated by Macbeth's bravery, king Duncan calls him valiant cousin and worthy gentleman (line 24). We notice here that king Duncan is easily deceived by appearances; he ignores the fact that people's faces can hide evil intentions. He doesn't know that the Macbeth he is praising as a hero will turn into a traitor himself. We are also told in this scene how Macbeth fought like a lion. The end of this scene (page 25) initiates the theme of treason and the current Thane of Cawdor (the traitor) is going to be put to death for treason. To reward Macbeth for his loyalty and bravery king Duncan decides to confer the title of Thane of Cawdor upon Macbeth (a kind of promotion). Duncan's last statement in this scene: what he has lost, Macbeth has won serves to explain the witches's earlier quote: the battle is lost and won.

**Scene 3:** In this scene, we come to meet the witches again on their way to meet Macbeth. These witches or the Weird Sisters as they are sometimes called complain about the evil done to them by mankind; this perhaps explains why they are engaged in this business of witchcraft.

This scene also describes the witches as having supernatural powers: they can cause winds to blow, tempests and natural chaos. They are there to meet Macbeth. Then there's a shift to Macbeth speaking to Banquo saying: so foul and fair a day I haven't seen (line 38) this echoes the witches's statement earlier. This again makes us suspect that there is a kind of link or bond between Macbeth and these strange creatures. The witches look weird because they are bearded: on lines 45, 46, Banquo says to them: you should be women and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so; we can speak here about the gender issue, especially bearing in mind that Lady Macbeth herself later will ask the evil spirits to turn here from a woman into a man. This is a question we will tackle later when we deal with the theme of masculinity and femininity. During this encounter the witches make 3 important statements or prophecies (2 for Macbeth and 1 for Banquo). First they hail or greet him as Thane of Cawdor; at this stage we should keep in mind that Macbeth has not yet learnt about his future promotion. The second prophecy for Macbeth is that he is going to be king. In a way what the witches are doing is predicting the future. We as readers, along with Macbeth are bewildered and perplexed by these predictions; in other words we are left in suspense as to whether the witches are speaking the truth or telling lies. Banquo, feeling a little bit envious of his friend Macbeth begs them to offer him some cheerful news, but they answer him in a language that is very confusing, to say the least.; for example, they say to him that; he will be lesser than Macbeth, and greater (line 65); not so happy, yet much happier (line 66); thou shalt get kings though thou be none (line 67). As you notice the language they speak lacks all clarity; that is why Banquo describes them as imperfect speakers (line 70). Afterwards the witches vanish and disappear in the air leaving Macbeth and Banquo rubbing their hands with joy as a result of the good news they have been told by the witches.

After the witches's departure, Macbeth and Banquo meet Ross, a noble man and servant of king Duncan. The latter tells Macbeth that the king has made him Thane of Cawdor. Ross's news vindicates the witches' s prophecy. Macbeth's immediate reaction is disbelief: can the devil speak the truth ( line 108). This will encourage Macbeth to start imagining and envisaging himself as a king in the future. The question left unanswered is how is that possible to realize bearing in mind that the current king Duncan is still alive and he is already thinking about appointing his eldest son Malcolm as the future and legitimate heir to the throne. Therefore the only way for Macbeth to achieve kingship is by getting rid of king Duncan and his sons Malcolm and Donalbain . On page 37 and from line 120 to line 145, Macbeth goes through an inner debate about whether it's morally justified to commit regicide ( the name given to the act of murdering a king or a queen);

**Scene 4:** This scene teems with the theme of appearance vs reality and Shakespeare uses the device of irony to show and illustrate the discrepancy or gap between appearance and reality. We move now to the king castle (a sort of palace in those days). King Duncan is having a conversation with his son Malcolm about the rebel traitor who was put to death for treason. King Duncan feels utterly disappointed because he has laid so much trust in the former Thane Of Cawdor .; he says to his son Malcolm: there is no art/ to find the mind's construction in the face/ he was a gentleman on whom I built an absolute trust ( lines 12,13,14). There is a big irony here because king Duncan will again be deceived and betrayed by his best servant Macbeth. In this scene we also witness king Duncan's generosity and virtuous character; for example, he decides to lavish his generous gifts on all his loyal servants and to honor Macbeth and his wife by having a dinner banquet in their castle. The big irony here is that king Duncan is sowing the seeds of his own destruction by blindly trusting Macbeth and his wife Lady Macbeth.; he is totally unaware that they will plot to murder him in an attempt to take the throne for themselves.

**Scene 5:** this scene contains the famous letter sent by Macbeth to his wife revealing to her the witches's prophecies. The letter contains all the details about his meeting with the witches. The letter begins with the pronoun they in reference to the weird sisters or the witches. In this letter Macbeth refers to his wife as his partner in greatness. Lady Macbeth swiftly begins to think about a murder scheme, but she fears that her husband hasn't got the guts to carry it out: yet do I fear thy nature ; it is too full of the milk of human kindness, ( lines 15 and 16); in other words Macbeth' s nature is too soft and therefore he needs the help and courage of his wife. On lines 25,26 and 27, she urges him to hasten home so that she can spur his ambition and fuel his desire for kingship; she says: hie thee hither/ that i may pour my spirits in thine ear/ and chastise with the vailour of my tongue/ all that impedes thee from the golden round. As said earlier, lady Macbeth is ready to do whatever it takes to achieve power; she is even ready to change or give up her femininity for that; on lines 40,41,42,43 of this scene, she says: come, you spirits/ that tend on mortal thoughts/ unsex me here/ And fill me from the crown to the toe,/top full/ of direst cruelty. When Macbeth comes back home, he displays signs of hesitation and lack of determination. She advises him to use the art of deception to hide his real intentions and achieve his goals; she says to him: look like the innocent flower/ but be the serpent under it (lines 64, 65, 66)

**Scene 6:** This scene elaborates more on the theme of appearance and reality; when king Duncan arrives to Macbeth's castle he describes it as a hospitable, inviting place; at the very opening of this scene Macbeth says Macbeth's castle where he is invited for the night: This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air/ Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself/ unto our senses (lines 1,2,3). Here Macbeth feels a sense of comfort and security as a guest in Macbeth's castle; he has no suspicion whatsoever as to the harm and evil in store for him. Macbeth's false sense of security is reinforced by the fact that the martlet, which is a kind of migratory bird, has chosen to build its nest in Macbeth's castle leads to the conclusion that this is a safe and secure place; Macbeth says ,referring to the martlet: this guest of summer/the temple haunting martlet ,does approve/ by his loved mansionary that the heaven's breath/ smells wooingly her ( lines 4,5,6,7). This scene ends with a very vivid image of hypocrisy and deception when Macbeth naively delivers himself to his hostess Lady Macbeth; in the last quote of this scene, Macbeth says: Give me your hand/ conduct me to my host. We love him highly/ and shall continue our graces towards him/ by your leave, hostess ( last quote in this scene) .

**Scene 7:** This is a crucial scene in the play because it constitutes a moment of decision for Macbeth to make up his mind whether to commit the murder or not. This scene opens with Macbeth debating in his mind whether it is morally justifiable to kill king Duncan; at first he says that there are two reasons why he should not do it: the first reason is that king Duncan is a relative; the second reason is that king Duncan is a guest and therefore it's Macbeth's duty to protect the life of his guest and guarantee his safety: He is here on double trust/ First as i am his kinsman and his subject/ strong both against the deed, then as his host ( lines 12,13,14). Macbeth's inner conflict ends in his conclusion that he has no convincing reason to kill king Duncan, except his excessive ambition: on lines 25,26,27and 28, he says: I have no spur/ to prick the sides of my intent, but only vaulting ambition, which overleaps itself,/ and falls on the other. This quote introduces the theme of excessive ambition which we will tackle when dealing with the themes. When Lady Macbeth notices her husband's hesitations, she starts manipulating him by playing on the chord of manhood and cowardice; she accuses him of lacking in manhood and compares him to the cat that would like to have the fish without wetting its paws. She reassures Macbeth that she has laid out a perfect, infallible plan, namely, Macbeth will kill king Duncan and the blame will be placed on his chamberlains, that is his guardians. This scene ends again with a quote related to the theme of appearance vs reality; Macbeth says: False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

### **An analysis of Macbeth, Act two.**

**Scene 1.**Inside Macbeth's castle, Banquo and his son Fleance are talking about this dark night (no moon, no stars). It's almost as if Shakespeare is preparing the context for the most horrible and horrific crime to take place. In most of Shakespeare's plays, evil deeds take place at night because evil needs to hide in darkness whereas the day is often associated with light which comes to uncover all the wrong doing taking place at night.

The setting in time is night time and events are taking place inside Macbeth's castle. This is very significant because it makes Macbeth's crime heinous and outrageous; in other words, Macbeth will take advantage of the night to carry out his plan secretly and he will also murder king Duncan while the latter is unsuspectingly sleeping. In an exchange with Macbeth, Banquo says that he has dreamed of the three witches the night before; Macbeth replies that he's forgotten all about them. Macbeth is lying here because we all know that he has been thinking about the witches's prophecies all the time. The second important event in this scene is the apparition of the dagger tempting Macbeth to king Duncan's room. The dagger here is imaginary and illusory (a kind of hallucination): is this a dagger I see before me/ the handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee. (lines 33,34); in another quote, Macbeth says: a dagger of the mind, a false creation/ proceeding/ from the heat oppressed brain ( lines 38,39). The dagger is leading Macbeth to king Duncan's room. This scene ends with a description of the chamber men or guardians who are supposed to keep an eye on king Duncan; they are dead asleep because Lady Macbeth has intoxicated them with too much alcohol so that they would not be aware of Macbeth's crime and the whole blame will be laid on them. Macbeth enters king Duncan's room and kills him.

**Scene 2:** In this scene Lady Macbeth claims that she would have killed him herself but she felt pity for him because king Duncan's face resembles that of her father: had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it (lines12,13). As Macbeth shows up with his hands stained in blood, he hears a voice saying to him: sleep no more/ Macbeth doth murder sleep, the innocent sleep (lines 35, 36). The word sleep here is very symbolic and has many connotations; first, it refers to the innocent king Duncan who. is murdered in his sleep; secondly, it's a reference to the idea of guilt and culpability; in other words, Macbeth and his wife will never enjoy a-clean and clear conscience because of their guilt. Later in the play we shall see how Lady Macbeth will suffer from insomnia and will spend her nights talking to herself about her guilt and sleepwalking. When she sees her husband coming with his hands covered in blood, she urges him to take back the daggers to the crime scene. We also witness how Macbeth begins to feel remorse and regret; he says: I am afraid to think what I had done (line 51). So far Lady Macbeth is still the one taking the initiative and manipulating her husband: she's the one who has devised this murder plan and also she is trying to strengthen her husband when he shows signs of weakness.

She decides to cover the faces of the sleeping grooms with blood so that the blame will be laid on them: I will glid the faces of the grooms withal/ For it must seem their guilt (lines 56, 57). Macbeth becomes so much haunted and obsessed by a sense of overwhelming guilt that he says: Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood/ clean from my hand? No this my hand will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine/ Making the green one red (lines 60, 61, 62, 63). This is a very powerful water image reflecting Macbeth's sense of guilt and the enormity of the crime he has committed. Of course this is an exaggerated image but Shakespeare is trying to say that this murder is a cosmic

crime because it's a regicide; we should remember that in those days, monarchs were considered to be God's deputies on earth. In response to her husband's lamentations, Lady Macbeth says: A little water clears of this deed (line 67). She is trying to reassure her husband that this is a petty crime and that everything will turn out for the better.

**Scene 3:** There's a huge knock on the door; it's Macduff coming to accompany the king on a journey. Macbeth leads him to the king's room. Meanwhile, Lennox (a-minor character) is speaking to Macbeth about the strange things that have happened that night and that there was chaos in the natural world (strong winds, tempests, chimneys have been blown down, the owl has been screaming all night long and that even the earth has shaken. The point here is that committing a murder such as a regicide disrupts the order of the world and creates chaos. It's a sign of God's wrath and displeasure.

Macduff comes out of king Duncan's room crying: Horror, horror/ Confusion now hath made his masterpiece (line 63). Everybody starts shouting the words murder and treason, including Macbeth. As for Lady Macbeth, she pretends she doesn't know anything and asks Macduff what the noise is all about; the polite and gentleman like Macduff answers her that this is no a good thing for a lady to hear: o gentle lady/ 'tis not for you to hear what I can speak! / The repetition in a woman s ear/ would murder as it fell (lines 83, 84, 85, 86). In other words, if Macduff were to expose her to the shocking news, she would die as a result of the shock. We also notice in this scene how Macbeth's conscience begins to sting him: Had i but died an hour before this chance/ I had lived a blessed time ( lines 91,92). He probably realizes that this future life will be full of remorse and suffering as a result of his guilt. Macduff rushes to wake up the king s sons Malcolm and Donalbain. He tells them that their father has been assassinated by his chamber men or grooms, as it seems: Those of his chamber, as it seemed had done it/ Their hands and faces were all badged with blood/ So were the daggers ( lines 101,102,103). Therefore the king's guardians are accused of something they have not done (appearance vs reality). They are turned into a scapegoat (somebody punished for a crime or offense he or she has not done). Moreover, Macbeth announces that he has already killed them out of love and revenge for king Duncan; he claims that the pitiable sight of the wounded body of his king prompted him to take a quick revenge; he goes on to say that his love for king Duncan is so great that he could not wait to punish them: The expedition of my violent love/ outrun the pauser reason. Here lay Duncan / His silver skin laced with his golden blood (lines 110,111,112). Here it's important to note how Duncan's body is described in terms of precious metals ( silver skin and golden blood). As I said earlier, monarchs during Shakespeare's era were chosen by God to rule on earth; they are the chosen ones. Afterwards, there is a shift to Malcolm and Donalbain and their reaction to the murder of their father. They both decide to immediately flee: Malcolm is heading to England to seek refuge whereas Donalbain goes to Ireland. They both realize that there's no safety

for them in Scotland and that it will be very wise to run for their lives. They know for sure that the perpetrators of the crime will also target them. There is no one to trust anymore. As Donalbain says: There's daggers in people's smiles, the nearer in blood, the nearer bloody (lines 140,141).

**Scene 4:** This is a very short scene where we witness the consequences of Macbeth's crime on the natural world; his crime has resulted in confusion and chaos in the world of nature; for example, it is said that Duncan's horses turned wild and ate each other, which is an unnatural phenomenon for horses to devour each other. It's also said that a big falcon has been killed by a small mouse owl. The whole world is turned upside down. It's also important to note that Malcolm's and Donalbain's escape cast suspicion on them: Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's two sons are stolen and fled; which puts upon them suspicion (lines 25, 26, 27).

### **Commentaries on Macbeth, Act three**

**Scene 1:** Banquo and Macbeth meet again. They are suspicious of each other. Banquo thinks that everything the witches have promised Macbeth have come true: he has been promoting to the status of Thane of Cawdor and now he has become king. However, Banquo suspects that Macbeth has used evil methods to achieve his goal; Banquo says: thou has it now- king, Cawdor, Glamis, all/ As the weird sisters promised, and I fear/ Thou play'st foul for it ( lines 1,2,3). In his mind, Banquo wonders whether his own children will become kings, as the witches prophesied. On his part, Macbeth is fearful that Banquo and his children constitute a threat to his crown; he says: our fear in Banquo stick deep (lines 47,48). Macbeth reminds Banquo of the feast that night but Banquo replies that he and his son Fleance are going on a ride and that they will join Macbeth and the guests later that evening. Macbeth is mad he has done the dirty work for Banquo and his children, bearing in mind that Macbeth is childless and therefore it's Banquo's children who are going to become kings. Macbeth decides that In order to secure his crown, he must murder Banquo and his son Fleance. For that purpose he hires or employs 3 murderers to accomplish that mission. Macbeth uses manipulative skills to frame them against Banquo: he tells them that Banquo has always been the cause of their misfortune and misery.

**Scene 2:** This scene takes place in Macbeth's castle Lady Macbeth and her husband are ill at ease because they both realize that killing king Duncan has not brought them the peace and joy they have expected. She says that all their manoeuvrings have been fruitless; she says: Nought's had, all is spent/ where our desire is got without content/ 'tis safer to be that which we destroy/ Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy ( lines 4,5,6,7). Similarly Macbeth feels so sad and guilty and expresses his wish to die because murdering king Duncan has not brought him joy and happiness; instead, he lives in guilt, fear and suspicion of those around him; he says: 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 (lines 19, 20, 21, 22).

Lady Macbeth reminds Macbeth that they have guests to entertain and that it would be improper to keep a sad, gloomy face in front of them; she says to him: Gentle my lord, sleek over your/ rugged looks/ Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight ( lines 28,29). Macbeth's reply is that his suspicion of Banquo and those around him is spoiling the fun for him; he feels restless and uncomfortable; he says: O, full of scorpions is my mind dear wife/ Thou know st, that Banquo, and his Fleance lives (lines 36,37). At the end of this scene, Macbeth hints to his wife that he has a great mission to accomplish that night: There shall be done a deed of dreadful note (lines 43, 44). It's important to note here that Macbeth doesn't reveal to his wife the kind of plan he has in mind (his plan to kill Banquo and his son Fleance). He has devised his plan on his own. He has decided to follow his murderous path till the very end.

**Scene 3:** This scene is very short and describes how Banquo and his son Fleance are assaulted by the 3 murderers hired by Macbeth. Banquo is slaughtered but his son Fleance manages to flee. Before he dies, Banquo says to his son: fly Fleance, fly (line 18). Fleance's escape serves to increase Macbeth's suspicion that Banquo's children will become kings; therefore there will be no peace of mind for Macbeth.

**Scene 4:** we are still in Macbeth's castle wherein he and his wife are entertaining their guests. One of the 3 murderers comes to announce to him the news that Banquo has been eliminated and that his son Fleance has fled away. This is not cheerful news to Macbeth; he is saddened and dampened by this news. His wife notices his low spirits and urges him to try to look cheerful in front of his guests. He joins the guests and one of them invites him to sit on an empty chair, but Macbeth sees no empty chair; all he sees is Banquo's ghost. Banquo's ghost, of course, is just an illusion, a hallucination; it's a projection of Macbeth's guilt; it's as if Banquo's spirit has come back to haunt Macbeth's conscience and poison his mind. To the surprise of his guests, Macbeth starts talking to the ghost which the guests don't see, a sign of madness, perhaps. Macbeth's descent into irrationality makes Lady Macbeth embarrassed. She quickly saves the situation by reassuring the guests that it has been a usual habit of her husband to fall into those hallucinating moods from time to time. She asks them to leave and that she will take care of her husband. She urges her husband to pull himself together and behave like a man.

**Scene 5:** We meet again with the witches and their leader Hecate. She's angry at them because they have not asked her or consulted her before dealing with Macbeth. She says that the plan to manipulate Macbeth would have been better if they had asked her for advice.

**Scene 6:** This scene is full of information about the rumours that are spread in Scotland. Two minor characters are speaking about the situation in Scotland; it's important to note that these characters are speak with a sense of irony and mockery; they don't believe in

those rumors. The first rumor is that Macbeth has been mourning the death of the good king Duncan: The gracious Duncan was pitied of Macbeth (lines 3, 4). The second rumor is that Banquo was killed by his own son Fleance: And The right valiant Banquo walked too late/ Whom you may say, if it please you, Fleance killed (lines 5, 6). The third rumor is: How monstrous/ it was Malcolm and for Donalbain/ to kill their gracious father ( lines 8,9,10). All these rumors are encouraged and spread by Macbeth's regime to cover up his atrocious crimes. We also learned in this scene that Macduff has fled to England to seek the help of the good king of England in order to get rid of Macbeth who has turned into a tyrant. We also learn that Malcolm, who is the rightful and legitimate king of Scotland, is now living in refuge under the protection of king Edward of England : The son of Duncan/ From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth lives in the English court, and is received/ of the most pious Edward ( lines 24, 25, 26, 27). People in Scotland are impatiently waiting for the return of Macduff and prince Malcolm so that they restore order and peace to Scotland: we may again give our tables meat, sleep to our nights (lines 33, 34).

## Macbeth, Act Five

### Scene1:

We are in Lady Macbeth's bedroom where the doctor and Lady Macbeth's gentlewoman ( the woman waiting on her) are having a conversation about the mental health of Lady Macbeth. The doctor wants to gather information about her so that he can find a cure for her sick mind. The gentlewoman informs him that Lady Macbeth has been recently seen sleepwalking and rubbing her hands all the time. We all remember Macbeth's statement that Macbeth has murdered sleep, therefore Macbeth shall sleep no more; now it's lady Macduff who is bearing the immediate consequences of their crime, that is to say, because she has planned killing Duncan in his sleep, she is deprived of sleep herself; it's a kind of divine punishment. secondly, the rubbing of the hands is a symbolic gesture to clear and clean the guilt off her hands. Again, we all remember when immediately after the murder, she said to Macbeth that just a little water clears them of this deed, she has never imagined that she will be haunted forever by guilt and regret. She smells the blood on her hand and acts like she can't clean it: Here 's the smell of blood still/ All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand ( lines 46,47). The doctor concludes that her problem is spiritual, not physical; therefore he has no cure for her.

### Scene 2:

we are now in the Scottish countryside. A group of Scottish rebel forces are marching towards Macbeth's castle; they are going to join Malcolm and Macduff's army coming from the south in order to wage war against Macbeth, the tyrant. Malcolm's army is led by Malcolm, Macduff, Malcolm's uncle Siward and his son young Siward. Before attacking Macbeth's castle, they have arranged to meet near Birnam wood. The name of Birnam wood reminds us of the third apparition shown to Macbeth in Act 4. This

apparition said to Macbeth that he won't be defeated until: Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane Hill shall come against him ( lines 91,92).

### **Scene 3:**

Inside Macbeth's castle Seyton, one of Macbeth's servants, informs him that many of his soldiers are deserting him and joining forces with Malcolm's army. This doesn't decrease his self confidence since the witches have told him that he is invincible; he can't be defeated; he says: Till Birnam wood to Dunsinane/ I cannot taint with fear ( lines 2,3). News come to him that a huge army is marching towards his castle; he rushes to put on his armour; he is ready to die fighting. : I-will fight till from my bones/ My flesh be hacked (line 32).

### **Scene 4:**

Near Birnam wood, Malcolm's army has joined the Scottish rebel forces. Malcolm orders all the soldiers to cut down a branch of a tree each and hold it in front of their faces while marching towards Macbeth's castle. This strategy will make Macbeth unable to know the number of Malcolm's soldiers.

### **Scene 5:**

Macbeth chooses to stay inside his castle thinks that its strong and fortified walls will prevent Malcolm's army from penetrating it. We also learn in this scene that Lady Macbeth has taken her own life by committing suicide. Her death makes Macbeth realize the meaninglessness and futility of life; in one of the most famous meditations in the play, Macbeth compares life a brief candle and a poor actor on the stage: Out, out, brief candle! / life is but a walking's hadow, a poor player,/ That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,/And then is heard no more; it is a tale/ Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing ( lines 23,24,25,26,27,28). The gist of this wonderful quote is that life, like a candle, is short and evanescent. Life is like a performance on the stage where actors play their roles successfully or unsuccessfully and then leave the stage.

### **Scene 6:**

Malcolm is giving orders to his army; he commands young Siward to start the attack.

### **Scene 7:**

The confrontation between Macbeth and young Siward ends in the death of the latter. When Macbeth killhim, He says: Thou wast born of woman (line12). This shows that Macbeth still believes in the witches's prophecies. Macduff tells Malcolm that he wants to kill Macbeth himself because he doesn't want to be haunted by the souls of his family members; therefore he proceeds to face Macbeth one on one ( face to face). It's important to keep in mind that so far Macbeth still believes in the witches' s prophecy that no man

born of a woman shall kill Macbeth. However Macduff has some shocking news for him; Macduff says: Macduff was from his mother's womb/ untimely ripped ( line 5). That means that Macduff didn't have a natural birth; his mother had to go through a caesarean operation to give birth to him. Perhaps ,it's on now that Macbeth realizes that he has misread the witches' s prophecies. Old Siward is told about the death of his young son and feels sour about it; yet he is comforted that his son has died a soldier' s death, a martyr. Macduff enters carrying Macbeth' s head, offers it to Malcolm, the rightful and legitimate king of Scotland. Macduff says to Malcolm: ! Hail,king / for so thou art ( line 19). To show and express his gratitude, Malcolm gives every soldier the title of earl.

### **Analysis of Act four of MACBETH**

**Scene 1:** we meet with the witches again. They are in the process of making some weird concoction; the ingredients they use are very disgusting and revolting (toe of frog, lizard's leg, tooth of wolf etc). The question here is why does Shakespeare dwell so meticulously on witchcraft matters? The answer is two fold: first, he wants to satisfy public interest in the topic of witchcraft which was commonplace at the time he was writing; secondly, Shakespeare wanted to please king James 1 because the latter was very much fascinated by the witchcraft subject. In fact king James I was a learned person; he actually wrote a book on this subject which he titled On Demonology. After that, we attend a meeting between Macbeth and the witches. During this encounter, the witches reveal three apparitions to him. The first apparition tells him to be aware of Macduff. The second apparition shows the face of a bloody child and says: no man of a woman born/ shall harm Macbeth (lines 78, 79).The reference here is to Macduff because later in the play in Act 5 we come to learn that Macduff was born in a caesarean operation. For the time being, this reassures Macbeth that he is out of harm's reach. The third apparition shows a child crowned with a tree and says to him: Macbeth shall never vanquished be until/ Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane Hill/ shall come against him (lines 90,91,92). Dunsinane wood is a small forest near Macbeth's castle; in other words, for Macbeth to be defeated it would take a miracle such as the trees of this forest to actually walk towards Macbeth's castle; therefore it's absolutely impossible that Macbeth shall be defeated. Just like the first apparition, this one also reinforces his sense of self confidence. Not satisfied with these revelations, Macbeth wants to know more, especially about Banquo's sons; he desperately asks the witches : 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? (lines 98, 99, 100, 101). A show of eight kings followed by Banquo appears before Macbeth. Banquo appears to be mockingly smiling at Macbeth; it's as if Banquo is reminding Macbeth of the proverb: he who laughs last. Before Macbeth seeks to understand the meaning of the last revelation, the witches disappear, leaving him in a state of fury and frustration. Macbeth's anger is exacerbated by the news that Macduff has fled to England, probably to form an alliance with the exiled prince Malcolm, son of king Duncan. Macbeth regrets not having killed Macduff earlier and decides that from

now onwards, he will act on impulse and spontaneously follow the dictates of his heart; he says: from this moment/ The very firstlings of my heart shall be/ The very firstlings of my hand (lines 44, 45,46). In an act of revenge, Macbeth orders that Macduff's castle be assaulted and his family destroyed; in other words Macbeth decides to become a tyrant killing innocent people.

**Scene 2:** We shift now to Macduff's castle where we meet lady Macduff and her intelligent little son. Lady Macduff complains to Ross about her husband's indifference and lack of care for them; according to her, husband Macduff has failed in his duties as a husband and a father; she says: He loves us not/ He wants the natural touch; for the poor wren/ the most diminutive of birds will fight/ Her young one in the nest ( lines 8,9,10); in other words, in the world of nature, even the smallest creature will defend its offspring against predators; therefore, it's inconceivable that Macduff should leave his defenseless family and flee to England. Ross tries to convince her that perhaps her husband has a much more noble excuse and motivation; he says: He is noble, wise, judicious, and best knows/The fits of the season (lines 16, 17). A messenger comes to warn lady Macduff to escape because Macbeth has ordered that Macduff's family be destroyed, but it's already too late. The murderers hired by Macbeth to perform this evil deed arrive and carry out his orders. This scene highlights the tyranny of Macbeth and his killing of innocent people.

**Scene 3:** This scene offers a vivid image of what Scotland has become like under the tyrannical rule of Macbeth: Each new morning/ New orphans howl, new orphans cry; new sorrows/ strike heaven on the face ( lines 4,5,6).This scene also portrays Malcolm as a clever king of Scotland; he is different from his father. Yes it's true that his father is generous and virtuous but he is easily deceived by appearances; he is unable to read people minds; for example, he is easily duped by Macbeth and his wife. Malcolm, on the other hand, isn't going to make the same mistake; before he can trust Macduff, he puts him to a test. Malcolm accuses Macduff of being an agent working for Macbeth; Macduff's response is that he is not treacherous (line 18). In the second test Malcolm pretends that he is worse than Macbeth and that he has more vices and therefore not fit to govern Scotland. He asks Macduff if he is ready to accept Malcolm as a ruler in spite of all his defects. Macduff's reply is an emphatic no: Fit to govern! / No, not to live! Oh nation miserable (lines 103, 104). Macduff is crying the loss of his beloved country Scotland because even Malcolm, the last hope for Scotland, is found to be imperfect. Macduff doesn't know that Malcolm is just testing his honesty and sincerity. When Macduff refuses to overlook those vices depicted by Malcolm, the latter realizes that Macduff is a true and loyal subject of Malcolm and Scotland. The message Shakespeare is trying to convey is that a good king should never blindly trust those around him; it's a message to king James 1 that traitors can always be around the corner. In fact king James himself has been the subject of a conspiracy by some extreme catholics. Fortunately,

those responsible were arrested and held to account. This scene also describes another aspect of good kingship in the person of king Edward of England; this goodly king is referred to as a holy saint, blessed by God to cure the diseased (from line. 140 to line160). While Malcolm and Macduff are making arrangements to get rid of the tyrant Macbeth, Ross enters and delivers the chilling news that Macduff's family has been decimated by Macbeth; Ross says: your castle surprised; your wife and baby savagely slaughtered (lines 204, 205). Macduff's pain and anguish is so big that he starts shedding tears. Malcolm urges him to: dispute it as a man (line 20). Macduff's reply is the following: I shall do so; / But I must also feel it as a man (lines 220,221). We must remember that this is a society where strength and masculinity are championed and weaknesses are not allowed. The lesson Macduff is teaching Malcolm here is that to be able to show pity, sympathy, grief and sorrow is not a sign of weakness.

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### **A study of major characters in Macbeth**

**Macbeth:** He is a tragic hero in the classical sense of the word. According to Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, a tragic hero is a great virtuous character in a dramatic tragedy who is destined to a downfall, suffering or defeat because he has some flaws or defects in his personality and makes some unforgivable mistakes which contribute to his or her downfall. Macbeth at the beginning is glorified as a brave, praiseworthy hero, celebrated for his glorious victory over Duncan' s enemies. He is respected and described by king Duncan as worthy, valiant cousin. He is honoured by the king Duncan in two ways: 1 he is promoted to the higher status of Thane Of Cawdor. 2. King Duncan in person will have dinner and spend the night at Macbeth' s castle. Because of his greed and immoderate, excessive ambition, Macbeth and his wife decide to murder king Duncan in his sleep and become king and queen of Scotland. Macbeth' s flaw is his vaulting ambition. After he has committed regicide (the name used to describe the murder of a king or queen), Macbeth becomes haunted by his guilt but he doesn' t stop there; he starts making plans to destroy all those who might constitute a threat to his crown. He hires some criminals to kill Banquo and his son Fleance and also noble Macduff. Macbeth is also opportunistic; he takes advantage of Malcolm and his brother' s escape to accuse them of having murdered their father; he also fuels the 3 murderer' s anger against Banquo by convincing them that Banquo has always been behind their well being and good fortune. He manages to get rid of Banquo but Macduff escapes to England to join prince Malcolm, the rightful heir to the throne. Macbeth' s good reputation at the beginning is lost and deteriorated: he has turned Scotland into a sort of graveyard; people are tyrannized on a daily basis; a good example that illustrates Macbeth' s cruel regime is his order to destroy Macduff' s innocent and wonderful family. Macbeth has lost his virtuous reputation; he is called all sorts of names: devilish, tyrant, hellhound, dead butcher, etc. Macbeth pays a high price for his treachery and greed. His tragic end comes at the hand of the good, noble Macduff who kills him and restore order and peace to Scotland.

**Lady Macbeth:** She' s Macbeth' s wife. The first time we meet her is when she is reading the letter sent to her by her husband. She is very excited at the news that her husband will become king of Scotland, as predicted by the witches. In the letter, Macbeth calls her his partner in greatness; this is very significant because it shows that Macbeth knows he cannot achieve kingship on his own; he needs the help of his wife. Lady Macbeth, on her

part, knows that her husband relies on her to reach his goal; she says he is too full of the milk of human kindness; that is to say Macbeth is too soft and emotional that he can't carry out such the manly task of killing king Duncan. Lady Macbeth would like her husband to become king because through him she will become also powerful, a queen. Therefore Lady Macbeth uses her manipulative, cunning skills to overcome her husband to commit the murder; when she notices that her husband is reluctant and hesitant to commit the deed, she accuses him of cowardice and lack of manhood; these accusations are an insult to Macbeth's reputation as a brave, valiant warrior.

In Act 1 and Act 2, Lady Macbeth shows strength of character and a sense of leadership: she manages to convince her husband to kill king Duncan; she does all the planning; for example, she gets the king's guardians drunk and covers them with blood so that the accusation would be laid on them; when her husband starts speaking about the ghost of Banquo, she quickly saves the situation by telling the guests that her husband has those hallucinatory moods from time to time. In brief, Lady Macbeth so far is in control and in charge. Just like her husband, she is strong at the beginning but she falls apart later. In Act 3, 4 and 5, she is isolated and powerless. We are told that she sleepwalks and talks all the time about the blood on her hand. She says that all the sweet perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten her little hands. Actually the blood she constantly sees on her hand is symbolic: it symbolizes her guilt over the murder of king Duncan. Her deep sense of guilt and remorse causes her to descend into madness and ultimately commit suicide.

**Macduff:** He represents a foil or a contrast to Macbeth. Unlike Macbeth, Macduff is loyal to King Duncan and his sons Malcolm and Donalbain. He is also loyal to his own country Scotland. This is something that he demonstrates throughout the play; for example, he sacrifices his lovely family for the sake of Scotland; he escapes to England to form a coalition army and comes back to Scotland to rid it of Macbeth, the tyrant. His loyalty to prince Malcolm is clearly manifest at the end when he beheads Macbeth and delivers his head to Malcolm as a sign of loyalty. His concern for Scotland is above anything else, including his own family. Whenever bad news about Scotland reaches him, he utters the words (bleed, bleed, poor country). His actions are prompted by his love for and loyalty to his own country; whereas Macbeth's actions are motivated by greed and thirst for power. He plays a very important role in the play. First he respects the idea of the divine rights of kings; in Shakespeare's time, people believed that kingship was something granted by God; God appoints kings and queens to represent Him on earth; anyone like Macbeth who takes the throne by force is breaching and violating God's will and order. The punishment for anyone who transgresses these rules is punished, cursed and eternally damned to hell. The fate of Macbeth is no exception to this. The second important part that Macduff plays in the play is that he acts as a teacher to Malcolm, the future king of Scotland; for example, when Macduff learns about the destruction of his family at the cruel hands of Macbeth, he feels an extreme sense of anguish and pain.

Malcolm urges him to dispute like a man, that is to say, no room for grief and tears. Macduff replies that he must also feel it as a man; in other words, to be able to feel and show grief, compassion and sorrow is also part of being a man. Finally, many critics consider Macduff and Banquo, the real heroes of this dark play and Shakespeare is trying to flatter the Scottish king James 1 by raising these Scottish heroes to the position of praise

**Malcolm:** King Duncan has two sons, Malcolm and Donalbain. Malcolm is the oldest and is next in line of kingship. The first time we hear about him is when in Act One, his father announces that in a coronation ceremony he will appoint his son Malcolm as the heir and future king of Scotland. This is not good news for Macbeth who already has his eyes on the crown. When his father is murdered, Malcolm escapes and seeks refuge in England. This is not an act of cowardice, as some might think; on the contrary, it's a clever and wise step to take because Malcolm knows that whomever has murdered his father King Duncan is likely to target him and his brother. Unlike his father Malcolm is not deceived by appearances and doesn't trust those around him; he and his brother believe that there are daggers in people's smiles.

## **Major themes**

### **1.The theme of ambition:**

Macbeth's tragedy is caused by his excessive ambition and lust for power. Unlike Banquo Macbeth and Lady Macbeth can't keep in check their immoderate desire for kingship. Their ambition is prompted by the witches's prophecy. Almost like a serial killer, Macbeth doesn't stop at killing King Duncan; he kills anyone who constitute a threat to his throne. Macbeth's excessive ambition turns him into a monster, sowing destruction wherever he goes.

### **2. The theme of guilt:**

As a consequence of their guilt, lady Macbeth and her husband experience moral torture; they have blood on their hands, so to speak. Banquo's ghost is nothing but the reflection of Macbeth's own guilt. Lady Macbeth continues to see blood on her hands and ultimately becomes insane and commits suicide.

### **3. Loyalty vs betrayal and treason:**

From the very beginning, we notice that loyalty and faithfulness are highly cherished by this society; for example, King Duncan speaks about his disappointment at the treachery of the former Thane of Cawdor. In contrast, Macbeth is glorified and praised for his loyalty to King Duncan. However, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth take advantage of the

king's trust and commit the horrendous and atrocious act of regicide. King Duncan is not only a king but also a relative of Macbeth's.

#### **4. The theme of appearances vs reality:**

The meaning of this is that many things in this world are not what they seem to be. In the play, there are many examples that illustrate this; for example, in Act 1. King Duncan says to his son Malcolm that there is no way to read the mind's construction; when King Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle, he is deceived by the sweet and pleasant air surrounding it. When King Duncan is assassinated, Donalbain tells his brother Malcolm that they had better flee because there are daggers in people's smiles. Finally, Lady Macbeth urges her husband to hide his evil intentions by keeping a smile on his face; she says to him: look like the flower, but be the serpent under it. There are many other examples related to this theme that we can explore.