

# **Shakespeare's 'Macbeth'**

*The 'best bits'  
booklet*

## Act 1

Act 1 Scene 1: The witches 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair' is an example of a paradox. This whole opening is written in trochaic tetrameter which Shakespeare rarely uses except for supernatural beings.

Act 1 Scene 2: Lots of positive adjectives are used to describe Macbeth at the start of the play; 'Brave Macbeth', 'noble Macbeth'. There is a delayed irony in that the current Thane of Cawdor is described as 'disloyal' but it is Macbeth that commits the worse atrocities.

Act 1 Scene 3: 'So foul and fair a day I have not seen' says Macbeth. An ironic echo here of the opening, foreshadows Macbeth's involvement in all things 'foul'.

Banquo and Macbeth react to the witches' prophecies:

### **BANQUO**

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

### **MACBETH**

Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more:  
By Sinel's death I know I am thane of Glamis;  
But how of Cawdor? the thane of Cawdor lives,  
A prosperous gentleman; and to be king  
Stands not within the prospect of belief,  
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence  
You owe this strange intelligence? or why  
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way  
With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge you.  
*Witches vanish*

How is Macbeth presented as an irrational character in this scene and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'irrational':

Unreasonable

Ridiculous

Superstitious

Insensate

Fearful

Gullible

**MACBETH**

[Aside] Two truths are told,  
As happy prologues to the swelling act  
Of the imperial theme.--I thank you, gentlemen.

*Aside*

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 heart knock at my ribs,  
Against the use of nature? Present fears  
Are less than horrible imaginings:  
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man that function  
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is  
But what is not.

**BANQUO**

Look, how our partner's rapt.

**MACBETH**

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

Act 1 Scene 4: Duncan ironically states 'There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face', clearly warning the audience of the perils of judging somebody by looks alone.

Act 1 Scene 5: The audience meet Lady Macbeth for the first time, reading a letter with news from her husband, 'they made themselves air, into which they vanished'.

**LADY MACBETH**

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor; and shalt be  
What thou art promised: yet do I fear thy nature;  
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness  
To catch the nearest way: thou wouldst be great;  
Art not without ambition, but without  
The illness should attend it: what thou wouldst highly,  
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,  
And yet wouldst wrongly win: thou'ldst 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 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,  
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem  
To have thee crown'd withal.

How is Lady Macbeth presented as an ambitious character in this scene and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'ambitious':

Determined

Bent upon

Aspiring

Desiring

Eager

Intent

Striving

Zealous

Ardent

In fact, most of Lady Macbeth's lines in this scene are significant and may be picked for the exam. It is worth revising all of this scene!

Consider how Lady Macbeth opposes gender stereotypes and how a Jacobean audience may have reacted.

**LADY MACBETH**

The raven himself is hoarse  
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan  
Under my battlements. 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! make thick my blood;  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,  
Wherever in your sightless substances  
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,  
And pall thee in the dunnest 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!'

Later in this scene she also says, 'look like th' innocent flower, but be the serpent under't', a lovely metaphor that includes contrast, juxtaposition, imagery and biblical allusion.

Act 1 Scene 6: Duncan describes 'this castle has a pleasant seat' which again is ironic as this is where the regicide will take place.

Act 1 Scene 7: A key scene when revising Lady Macbeth and her manipulative ways. It opens with Macbeth deliberating whether or not to commit regicide:

**MACBETH**

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well  
It were done quickly: if the assassination  
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch  
With his surcease success; that but this blow  
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,  
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,  
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases  
We still have judgment here; that we but teach  
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return  
To plague the inventor: this even-handed justice  
Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice  
To our own lips. 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. Besides, this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been  
So clear in his great office, that his virtues  
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against  
The deep damnation of his taking-off;  
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,  
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed  
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,  
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,  
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself  
And falls on the other.

How is Macbeth is presented as a confused character in this scene  
and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'confused':

Bewildered

Perplexed

Perturbed

**LADY MACBETH**

Was the hope drunk  
Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?  
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale  
At what it did so freely? From this time  
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard  
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' the adage?

**MACBETH**

Prithee, peace:  
I dare do all that may become a man;  
Who dares do more is none.

**LADY MACBETH**

What beast was't, then,  
That made you break this enterprise to me?  
When you durst do it, then you were a man;  
And, to be more than what you were, you would

Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place  
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:  
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now  
Does unmake you. 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.

How is Lady Macbeth presented as a manipulative character in this scene and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'manipulative':

Devious  
Scheming  
Contriving  
Cunning  
Premeditating  
Sly

The scene ends with Macbeth acquiescing (agreeing) to the deed of killing Duncan.

**MACBETH**

If we should fail?

**LADY MACBETH**

We fail!

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

## Act 2

Act 2 Scene 1: Macbeth is dismissive of the witches in front of Banquo: 'I think not of them'.

### **MACBETH**

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  
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but  
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,  
Proceeding from the heat-oppresed brain?  
I see thee yet, in form as palpable  
As this which now I draw.  
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;  
And such an instrument I was to use.  
Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,  
Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,  
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,  
Which was not so before. There's no such thing:  
It is the bloody business which informs  
Thus to mine eyes.

How is Macbeth presented as a disturbed character in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

### Synonyms for 'disturbed':

Confused  
Disordered  
Nervous  
Perplexed  
Insane  
Anxious

Act 2 Scene 2: The regicide (murder of the king) has taken place off stage.

### **MACBETH**

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

### **LADY MACBETH**

I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.



Did not you speak?

**MACBETH**

When?

**LADY MACBETH**

Now.

**MACBETH**

As I descended?

**LADY MACBETH**

Ay.

**MACBETH**

Hark!

Who lies i' the second chamber?

**LADY MACBETH**

Donalbain.

**MACBETH**

This is a sorry sight.

*Looking on his hands*

**LADY MACBETH**

A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

How are Macbeth and Lady Macbeth presented as nervous characters in this scene and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'nervous'

Hysterical

Agitated

Tense

Uneasy

Jittery

Afraid

Apprehensive

Macbeth declares that 'does murder sleep' which becomes an extended metaphor in the play. Later, Lady Macbeth sleepwalks.

**LADY MACBETH**

Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,

You do unbend your noble strength, to think

So brainsickly of things. Go get some water,

And wash this filthy witness 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. If he do bleed,

I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal;

For it must seem their guilt.

How is Lady Macbeth presented as controlling in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'controlling':

Authoritative

Decisive

In control

Demanding

Commanding

Powerful

Ruling

Macbeth is fixated on the blood on his hands asking 'Will all Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?'. Lady Macbeth ironically exclaims that 'a little water clears us of this deed' but it is her, later, who is obsessed with trying to wash her hands.

Act 2 Scene 3: Comic relief follows the death of Duncan. A porter crudely jokes about the night's partying and also implies that the castle 'is too cold for hell'

Macduff discovers the body of king Duncan.

**MACDUFF**

O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart

Cannot conceive nor name thee!

**MACBETH LENNOX**

What's the matter.

**MACDUFF**

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!  
Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope  
The Lord's anointed temple, and stole thence  
The life o' the 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: 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 Donalbain! Malcolm! awake!  
Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,  
And look on death itself! up, up, and see  
The great doom's image! Malcolm! Banquo!  
As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,  
To countenance this horror! Ring the bell.

*Bell rings*

How is Macduff presented as a loyal character in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'loyal':

Patriotic

Devoted

True

Dutiful

Trustworthy

Allegiant

Macbeth reacts rashly in a bid to cover up the truth; he kills the servants that were guarding Duncan.

**MACBETH**

Who can be wise, amazed, temperate and furious,  
Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man:  
The expedition my violent love  
Outrun the pauser, reason. Here lay Duncan,

His silver skin laced with his golden blood;  
And his gash'd stabs look'd like a breach in nature  
For ruin's wasteful entrance: there, the murderers,  
Steep'd in the colours of their trade, their daggers  
Unmannerly breech'd with gore: who could refrain,  
That had a heart to love, and in that heart  
Courage to make 's love known?

How is Macbeth presented as deceitful in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'deceitful':

Deceptive  
Fraudulent  
Misleading  
Untrustworthy  
Duplicitous  
Cunning  
False  
Sly  
Disingenuous

Act 2 Scene 4: Ross and an old man discuss supernatural occurrences. 'Suspicion of the deed' now lies with Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain as they have fled. Macbeth is now lined up to be king!

**NOTE:**

A classic 'greek' tragedy would be written in 5 parts.

1. Exposition
2. Rising Action
3. Climax
4. Falling Action
5. Denouement/resolution/revelation/catastrophe

These can be matched to the Acts of Macbeth. By the end of Act 2 – the rising action – Macbeth is about to become king, fulfilling the witches prophecies.

### **Act 3**

Act 3 Scene 1: Banquo is suspicious of Macbeth: 'I fear thou play'st most foully for it'. Macbeth fears Banquo:

## **MACBETH**

To be thus is nothing;  
But to be safely thus.--Our fears in Banquo  
Stick deep; and in his royalty of nature  
Reigns that which would be fear'd: 'tis much he dares;  
And, to that dauntless temper 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 him,  
My Genius is rebuked; as, it is said,  
Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid 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 my head they placed a fruitless crown,  
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,

How is Macbeth presented as mistrustful in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

### Synonyms of 'mistrustful':

Skeptical  
Disloyal  
Untrue  
Conspiring

NOTE: Learning a range of vocabulary to describe the central characters is really useful. These words could describe Macbeth at various points in the play: Unscrupulous, calculating, Machiavellian, cunning, devious, sly, treacherous, underhanded, mendacious, fallacious, equivocating, insincere, perfidious, duplicitous, phony etc.

Act 3 Scene 2: Macbeth keeps the planning of Banquo's murder a secret from Lady Macbeth: 'be innocent of the knowledge'. He is vexed (agitated) that Banquo could be a threat to his crown: 'O full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife'.

Act 3 Scene 3: Banquo is murdered: 'O treachery'.

Act 3 Scene 4: A key scene in which Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo:

**MACBETH**

The table's full.

**LENNOX**

Here is a place reserved, sir.

**MACBETH**

Where?

**LENNOX**

Here, my good lord. What is't that moves 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.

How is Macbeth presented as insane in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'insane':

Deranged

Mad

Crazed

Demented

Maniacal

Unhinged

Lady Macbeth takes control of the situation:

**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  
He will again be well: if much you note him,  
You shall offend him and extend his passion:  
Feed, and regard him not. 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!

This is the very painting of your fear:

This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,  
Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,  
Impostors to true fear, would well become  
A woman's story at a winter's fire,  
Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself!  
Why do you make such faces? When all's done,  
You look but on a stool.

Apply the same question as above OR the previous one about Lady Macbeth being in control.

Macbeth is losing all control at this point in the play. He has almost revealed his crimes to the banquet attendees. His mind appears to be guilt ridden: 'It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood'.

Act 3 Scene 5: Head witch, Hecate, tells the witches to prepare for Macbeth's next visit. They plan to 'draw him on to his confusion'.

Act 3 Scene 6: Lennox discusses events so far and alerts the audience that Malcolm is in England with Macduff. An army is forming to defeat Macbeth in Scotland.

#### **Act 4**

Act 4 Scene 1: The witches prepare the cauldron for Macbeth's arrival: 'double, double toil and trouble'.

'Something wicked this way comes'... The witches show three apparitions.

1. 'Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth, beware Macduff'
2. 'Be bloody, bold and resolute, laugh to scorn the power of man, for none of woman born shall harm Macbeth'
3. 'Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him'.

Act 4 Scene 2: Lady Macduff is upset that Macduff has left her alone and vulnerable: 'His flight was madness'. Lady Macduff and her son talk of Macduff's absence when some murderers come in:

**First Murderer**

Where is your husband?

**LADY MACDUFF**

I hope, in no place so unsanctified  
Where such as thou mayst find him.

**First Murderer**

He's a traitor.

**Son**

Thou liest, thou shag-hair'd villain!

**First Murderer**

What, you egg!

*Stabbing him*

Young fry of treachery!

**Son**

He has kill'd me, mother:

Run away, I pray you!

*Dies*

*Exit LADY MACDUFF, crying 'Murder*

How is Macbeth presented as a villain in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'villain':

Criminal

Anti-hero

Scoundrel

Devil

Act 4 Scene 3: Macduff and Malcolm discuss what it takes to be a king. Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty to Scotland, which he passes: 'O Scotland, Scotland!'

Act 5 Scene 1: Lady Macbeth is being watched 'in this slumbry agitation' (sleep walking) by her lady-in-waiting and a doctor. She appears mad and guilt-ridden. She speaks mainly in mono-syllabic utterances:

**LADY MACBETH**

Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: 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?--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 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.

How is Lady Macbeth presented as guilty in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms of 'guilty':

Culpable

Incriminated

Damned

Wicked

Reprehensible

Agitated

Unhinged

Lady Macbeth's lines echo previous ones in the play: 'Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand' and 'to bed, to bed; there's knocking at the gate'.

Act 5 Scene 2: Macbeth is almost without support and the Scots move to Birnam Wood to meet Malcolm's forces: 'Some say he's mad'.

Act 5 Scene 3: Macbeth is extremely agitated but loudly confident in what the apparitions have told him: 'Bring me no more reports, let them all fly'. He ironically declares 'I'll fight, till from my bones my flesh be hacked.'

Act 5 Scene 4: The English forces have met the Scots in Birnam Wood. The start to cut down the branches to hide behind while 'the confident tyrant keeps still in Dunsinane'.

Act 5 Scene 5: Macbeth is confident that he can withstand a siege. News of Lady Macbeth's death is delivered:

**SEYTON**

The queen, my lord, is dead.

**MACBETH**

She should have died hereafter;  
There would have been a time for such a word.  
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time,  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more: it is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.

How is Macbeth presented as pessimistic in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Synonyms for 'pessimistic':

Bleak  
Despondent  
Dejected  
Despairing  
Futile  
Morbid  
Foreboding  
Fatalistic

Act 5 Scene 6: The battle begins with 'worthy Macduff' advancing on Dunsinane.

Act 5 Scene 7: Macbeth must fight but remains confident: 'What's he that was not born of woman? Such a one am I to fear, or none'.

**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*

*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.  
I cannot strike at wretched kerns, whose arms  
Are hired to bear their staves: either thou, Macbeth,  
Or else my sword with an unbatter'd edge  
I sheathe again undeeded. There thou shouldst be;  
By this great clatter, one of greatest note  
Seems bruited. Let me find him, fortune!  
And more I beg not.  
*Exit. Alarums*

How is Macbeth presented as a villain and Macduff presented as a hero in this extract and elsewhere in the play?

Act 5 Scene 8: Macduff and Macbeth fight and Macduff reveals he 'was from his mother's womb untimely ripped' which means that he was born by caesarian. Macbeth, the 'hell hound', is slain.

Act 5 Scene 9: The victors count their losses and Malcolm becomes king. Macbeth's 'knell is knolled'.

Other ways that Macbeth is presented in the play... How is Macbeth presented as...

Nihilistic  
Anarchic  
Rebellious  
Immoral  
Insane  
Antihero  
Dishonorable

**Thus concludes the 'best bits' of Macbeth.**