

Scene 1 Macbeth's palace at Forres.

Banquo voices his suspicions of Macbeth but still hopes that the prophecy about his own children will prove true. Macbeth, as king, enters to request Banquo's presence at a state banquet. Banquo explains that he will be away during the day with his son, Fleance, but that they will return in time for the banquet. Alone, Macbeth expresses his fear of Banquo, because of the witches' promise that Banquo's sons will be kings. He persuades two murderers to kill Banquo and his son before the banquet.

[Enter Banquo.]

Banquo. Thou hast it now—King, Cawdor, Glamis, all
As the Weïrd Women promised, and I fear
Thou played'st most foully for 't. Yet it was said
It should not stand in thy posterity,

5 But that myself should be the root and father
Of many kings. If there come truth from them
(As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine),
Why, by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my oracles as well,

10 And set me up in hope? But hush, no more. **A**

[Sennet sounded. Enter Macbeth as King, Lady Macbeth, 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.

Macbeth. Tonight we hold a solemn supper, sir,

15 And I'll request your presence.

Banquo. Let your Highness
Command upon me, to the which my duties
Are with a most indissoluble tie
Forever knit.

Macbeth. Ride you this afternoon?

Banquo. Ay, my good lord.

20 **Macbeth.** We should have else desired your good advice
(Which still hath been both grave and prosperous)
In this day's council, but we'll take tomorrow.
Is 't far you ride?

A SOLILOQUY

Reread lines 1–10, in which Banquo hopes the witches' predictions for him will come true as they have for Macbeth. Why might Banquo want to hide his thoughts from Macbeth?

[Stage Direction] **Sennet sounded:**
A trumpet is sounded.

14–15 A king usually uses the royal pronoun *we*. Notice how Macbeth switches to *I*, keeping a personal tone with Banquo.

15–18 Banquo says he is duty bound to serve the king. *Do you think his tone is cold or warm here?*

21 grave and prosperous: thoughtful and profitable.



Banquo's murder

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

Macbeth. Fail not our feast.

Banquo. My lord, I will not.

Macbeth. We hear our bloody cousins are bestowed
30 In England and in Ireland, not confessing
Their cruel parricide, filling their hearers
With strange invention. But of that tomorrow,
When therewithal we shall have cause of state
Craving us jointly. Hie you to horse. Adieu,
35 Till you return at night. Goes Fleance with you?

Banquo. Ay, my good lord. Our time does call upon 's.

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

[Banquo *exits*.]

40 Let every man be master of his time
Till seven at night. To make society
The sweeter welcome, we will keep ourself
Till suppertime alone. While then, God be with you.

[Lords *and all but Macbeth and a Servant exit*.]

Sirrah, a word with you. Attend those men

45 Our pleasure?

Servant. They are, my lord, without the palace gate.

Macbeth. Bring them before us.

[Servant *exits*.]

To be thus is nothing,
But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
50 Reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares,
And to that dauntless temper of his mind
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valor
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear; and under him
55 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 hailed him father to a line of kings.

25–27 If his horse goes no faster than usual, he'll be back an hour or two (**twain**) after dark.

29 bloody cousins: murderous relatives (Malcolm and Donalbain); **bestowed:** settled.

32 strange invention: lies; stories they have invented. *What kinds of stories might they be telling?*

33–34 when . . . jointly: when matters of state will require the attention of us both.

40 be master of his time: do what he wants.

43 while: until.

44–45 sirrah: a term of address to an inferior; **Attend . . . pleasure:** Are they waiting for me?

47–48 To be thus . . . safely thus: To be king is worthless unless my position as king is safe.

51 dauntless temper: fearless temperament.

55–56 Banquo's mere presence forces back (**rebukes**) Macbeth's ruling spirit (**genius**). In ancient Rome, Octavius Caesar, who became emperor, had the same effect on his rival, Mark Antony.

60 Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
 And put a barren scepter in my grip,
 Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
 No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
 For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
 65 For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
 Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
 Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
 Given to the common enemy of man
 To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings.
 70 Rather than so, come fate into the list,
 And champion me to th' utterance.—Who's there? **B**
 [*Enter Servant and two Murderers.*]
 [*To the Servant*] Now go to the door, and stay there till we call.
 [*Servant exits.*]

Was it not yesterday we spoke together?
Murderers. It was, so please your Highness.

Macbeth. Well then, now

75 Have you considered of my speeches? Know
 That it was he, in the times past, which held you
 So under fortune, which you thought had been
 Our innocent self. This I made good to you
 In our last conference, passed in probation with you
 80 How you were borne in hand, how crossed, the instruments,
 Who wrought with them, and all things else that might
 To half a soul and to a notion crazed
 Say "Thus did Banquo."

First Murderer. You made it known to us.

Macbeth. I did so, and went further, which is now

85 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
 To pray for this good man and for his issue,
 Whose heavy hand hath bowed you to the grave
 90 And beggared yours forever?

First Murderer. We are men, my liege.

Macbeth. Ay, in the catalogue you go for men,
 As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
 Shoughs, water-rugs, and demi-wolves are clept
 All by the name of dogs. The valued file
 95 Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,
 The housekeeper, the hunter, every one
 According to the gift which bounteous nature

60–69 They gave me a childless (**fruitless, barren**) crown and scepter, which will be taken away by someone outside my family (**unlineal**). It appears that I have committed murder, poisoned (**filed**) my mind, and destroyed my soul (**eternal jewel**) all for the benefit of Banquo's heirs.

B TRAGEDY

In lines 70–71, Macbeth challenges fate to enter the combat arena so that he can fight it to the death. What will be the likely result of Macbeth's efforts to fight fate?

75–83 Macbeth supposedly proved (**passed in probation**) Banquo's role, his deception (**how you were borne in hand**), his methods, and his allies. Even a half-wit (**half a soul**) or a crazed person would agree that Banquo caused their trouble.

87–90 He asks whether they are so influenced by the gospel's message of forgiveness (**so gospelled**) that they will pray for Banquo and his children despite his harshness, which will leave their own families beggars.

91–100 The true worth of a dog can be measured only by examining the record (**valued file**) of its special qualities (**particular addition**).

Hath in him closed; whereby he does receive
 Particular addition, from the bill
 100 That writes them all alike. And so of men.
 Now, if you have a station in the file,
 Not i' th' worst rank of manhood, say 't,
 And I will put that business in your bosoms
 Whose execution takes your enemy off,
 105 Grapples you to the heart and love of us,
 Who wear our health but sickly in his life,
 Which in his death were perfect.

Second Murderer. I am one, my liege,
 Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
 Hath so incensed that I am reckless what
 110 I do to spite the world.

First Murderer. And I another
 So weary with disasters, tugged with fortune,
 That I would set my life on any chance,
 To mend it or be rid on 't.

Macbeth. Both of you
 Know Banquo was your enemy.

Murderers. True, my lord.
 115 **Macbeth.** So is he mine, and in such bloody distance
 That every minute of his being thrusts
 Against my near'st of life. And though I could
 With barefaced power sweep him from my sight
 And bid my will avouch it, yet I must not,
 120 For certain friends that are both his and mine,
 Whose loves I may not drop, but wail 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
 125 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,
 130 The moment on 't, for 't must be done tonight
 And something from the palace; always thought
 That I require a clearness. And with him
 (To leave no rubs nor botches in the work)
 Fleance, his son, that keeps him company,

103–107 Macbeth will give them a secret job (**business in your bosoms**) that will earn them his loyalty (**grapples you to the heart**) and love. Banquo's death will make this sick king healthy.

111 tugged with: knocked about by.

115–117 Banquo is near enough to draw blood, and like a menacing swordsman, his mere presence threatens (**thrusts against**) Macbeth's existence.

119 bid my will avouch it: justify it as my will.

Language Coach

Fixed Expressions What do you think the expression *the common eye* refers to in line 124? What is a similar **fixed**, or standard, **expression** in today's language?

127 Your spirits shine through you: Your courage is evident.

131–132 and something . . . clearness: The murder must be done away from the palace so that I remain blameless (**I require a clearness**).

135 Whose absence is no less material to me
Than is his father's, must embrace the fate
Of that dark hour. Resolve yourselves apart.
I'll come to you anon.

Murderers. We are resolved, my lord.

Macbeth. I'll call upon you straight. Abide within.

[Murderers *exit*.]

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

[*He exits*.]

Scene 2 Macbeth's palace at Forres.

Lady Macbeth and her husband discuss the troubled thoughts and bad dreams they have had since Duncan's murder. However, they agree to hide their dark emotions at the night's banquet. Lady Macbeth tries to comfort the tormented Macbeth, but her words do no good. Instead, Macbeth hints at some terrible event that will occur that night.

[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 attend his leisure
For a few words.

Servant. Madam, I will.

[*He exits*.]

Lady Macbeth. Naught's had, all's spent,

5 Where our desire is got without content.

'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. 

[Enter Macbeth.]

How now, my lord? Why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,

10 Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on? Things without all remedy
Should be without regard. What's done is done.

Macbeth. We have scorched the snake, not killed it.
She'll close and be herself whilst our poor malice

15 Remains in danger of her former tooth.
But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds 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,
20 Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,

135 **absence:** death. *Why is the death of Fleance so important?*

137 **Resolve yourselves apart:** Decide in private.

139 **straight:** soon.

4–7 Nothing (**naught**) has been gained; everything has been wasted (**spent**). It would be better to be dead like Duncan than to live in uncertain joy.

SOLILOQUY

Compare Lady Macbeth's brief soliloquy in lines 4–7 with what she says to Macbeth in lines 8–12. Why do you think she wants to conceal her real feelings from her husband?

16–22 He would rather have the world fall apart (**the frame of things disjoint**) than be afflicted with such fears and nightmares. Death is preferable to life on the torture rack of mental anguish (**restless ecstasy**).

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,
 25 Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
 Can touch him further.

Lady Macbeth. Come on, gentle my lord,
 Sleek o'er 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
 Both with eye and tongue: unsafe the while that we
 Must lave our honors in these flattering streams
 And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
 Disguising what they are.

Lady Macbeth. You must leave this.

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

Lady Macbeth. But in them Nature's copy's not eterne.

Macbeth. There's comfort yet; they are assailable.
 Then be thou jocund. Ere the bat hath flown
 40 His cloistered flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
 The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums
 Hath rung night's yawning peal, 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 night,
 Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
 And with thy bloody and invisible hand
 Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
 Which keeps me pale. Light thickens, and the crow
 50 Makes wing to th' rooky wood.
 Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
 Whiles night's black agents to their preys do rouse.—
 Thou marvel'st at my words, but hold thee still.
 Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.
 55 So prithee go with me.

[*They exit.*]

27 **sleek:** smooth.

30 **present him eminence:** pay special attention to him.

32 **lave . . . streams:** wash (**lave**) our honor in streams of flattery—that is, falsify our feelings.

33 **vizards:** masks.

37 **in them . . . not eterne:** Nature did not give them immortality.

39–43 **jocund:** cheerful; merry; **Ere the bat . . . note:** Before nightfall, when the bats and beetles fly, something dreadful will happen.

44 **chuck:** chick (a term of affection).

45 **seeling:** blinding.

48 **great bond:** Banquo's life.

50 **rooky:** gloomy; also, filled with rooks, or crows.

54 Things brought about through evil need additional evil to make them strong.

Scene 3 *A park near the palace.*

The two murderers, joined by a third, ambush Banquo and Fleance, killing Banquo. Fleance manages to escape in the darkness.

[Enter three Murderers.]

First Murderer. But who did bid thee join with us?

Third Murderer. Macbeth.

Second Murderer. [*To the First Murderer*]

He needs not our mistrust, since he delivers
Our offices and what we have to do
To the direction just.

First Murderer. Then stand with us.—

5 The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day.
Now spurs the lated traveler apace
To gain the timely inn, 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

10 That are within the note of expectation
Already are i' th' court.

First Murderer. His horses go about.

Third Murderer. Almost a mile; but he does usually
(So all men do) from hence to th' palace gate
Make it their walk.

[Enter Banquo and Fleance, with a torch.]

Second Murderer. A light, a light!

Third Murderer. 'Tis he.

15 **First Murderer.** Stand to 't.

Banquo. It will be rain tonight.

First Murderer. Let it come down!

[*The three Murderers attack.*]

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

[*He dies. Fleance exits.*]

Third Murderer. Who did strike out the light?

First Murderer. Was 't not the way?

20 **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.

[*They exit.*]

2–4 He needs . . . just: Macbeth should not be distrustful, since he gave us the orders (**offices**) and we plan to follow his directions exactly.

6 lated: tardy; late.

9 Give us a light: Banquo, nearing the palace, calls for servants to bring a light.

9–11 Then 'tis . . . court: It must be Banquo, since all the other expected guests are already in the palace.

15 Stand to 't: Be prepared.

18 Thou mayst revenge: You might live to avenge my death.

19 Was 't not the way: Isn't that what we were supposed to do? Apparently, one of the murderers struck out the light, thus allowing Fleance to escape.

Scene 4 The hall in the palace.

As the banquet begins, one of the murderers reports on Banquo's death and Fleance's escape. Macbeth is disturbed by the news and even more shaken when he returns to the banquet table and sees the bloody ghost of Banquo. Only Macbeth sees the ghost, and his terrified reaction startles the guests. Lady Macbeth explains her husband's strange behavior as an illness from childhood that will soon pass. Once the ghost disappears, Macbeth calls for a toast to Banquo, whose ghost immediately reappears. Because Macbeth begins to rant and rave, Lady Macbeth dismisses the guests, fearful that her husband will reveal too much. Macbeth, alone with his wife, tells of his suspicions of Macduff, absent from the banquet. He also says he will visit the witches again and hints at bloody deeds yet to happen.

[Banquet prepared. Enter Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Ross, Lennox, Lords, and Attendants.]

Macbeth. You know your own degrees; sit down. At first
And last, the hearty welcome.

[*They sit.*]

Lords. Thanks to your Majesty.

Macbeth. Ourself will mingle with society
And play the humble host.

5 Our hostess keeps her state, but in best time
We will require her welcome.

1 your own degrees: where your rank entitles you to sit.

5 keeps her state: sits on her throne rather than at the banquet table.



Macbeth and one of the murderers

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

[*Enter First Murderer to the door.*]

Macbeth. See, they encounter thee with their hearts' thanks.

10 Both sides are even. Here I'll sit i' th' midst.

Be large in mirth. Anon we'll drink a measure

The table round. [*Approaching the Murderer*] There's blood upon thy
face.

Murderer. 'Tis Banquo's then.

Macbeth. 'Tis better thee without than he within.

15 Is he dispatched?

Murderer. My lord, his throat is cut. That I did for him.

Macbeth. Thou art the best o' th' cutthroats,

Yet he's good that did the like for Fleance.

If thou didst it, thou art the nonpareil.

20 **Murderer.** Most royal sir, Fleance is 'scaped.

Macbeth. [*Aside*] Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect,

Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,

As broad and general as the casing air.

But now I am cabined, cribbed, confined, bound in

25 To saucy doubts and fears.—But Banquo's safe? **D**

Murderer. Ay, my good lord. Safe in a ditch he bides,

With twenty trenchèd gashes on his head,

The least a death to nature.

Macbeth. Thanks for that.

There the grown serpent lies. The worm that's fled

30 Hath nature that in time will venom breed,

No teeth for th' present. Get thee gone. Tomorrow

We'll hear ourselves again.

[*Murderer exits.*]

Lady Macbeth. My royal lord,

You do not give the cheer. The feast is sold

That is not often vouched, while 'tis a-making,

35 'Tis given with welcome. To feed were best at home;

From thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony;

Meeting were bare without it.

[*Enter the Ghost of Banquo, and sits in Macbeth's place.*]

Macbeth. [*To Lady Macbeth*] Sweet remembrancer!—

Now, good digestion wait on appetite

And health on both!

Lennox. May't please your Highness sit.

11 measure: toast. Macbeth keeps talking to his wife and guests as he casually edges toward the door to speak privately with the murderer.

15 dispatched: killed.

19 nonpareil: best.

23 casing: surrounding.

D ASIDE

Notice that Macbeth admits his fear in the aside in lines 21–25. What further actions might Macbeth take as a result of his fears?

29 worm: little serpent, that is, Fleance.

31 no teeth for th' present: too young to cause harm right now.

32 hear ourselves: talk together.

32–37 Macbeth must not forget his duties as host. A feast will be no different from a meal that one pays for unless the host gives his guests courteous attention (**ceremony**), the best part of any meal.

37 sweet remembrancer: a term of affection for his wife, who has reminded him of his duty.

40 **Macbeth.** Here had we now our country's honor roofed,
Were the graced person of our Banquo present,
Who may I rather challenge for unkindness
Than pity for mischance.

Ross. His absence, sir,
Lays blame upon his promise. Please 't your Highness
45 To grace us with your royal company?

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?

50 **Macbeth.** [*To the Ghost*] Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake
Thy gory locks at me.

Ross. Gentlemen, rise. His Highness is not well.

Lady Macbeth. Sit, worthy friends. My lord is often thus
And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat.

55 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. [*Drawing Macbeth aside*] Are you a man? **E**

Macbeth. Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
60 Which might appall 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

65 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.

Macbeth. Prithee see there. Behold, look! [*To the Ghost*] Lo, how say you?
70 Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.—
If charnel houses and our graves must send
Those that we bury back, our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites.
[*Ghost exits.*]

Lady Macbeth. What, quite unmanned in folly?

Macbeth. If I stand here, I saw him.

40–43 The best people of Scotland would all be under Macbeth's roof if Banquo were present too. He hopes Banquo's absence is due to rudeness rather than to some accident (**mischance**).

46 Macbeth finally notices that Banquo's ghost is present and sitting in the king's chair.

E DRAMATIC IRONY

In lines 53–58, Lady Macbeth tells her guests to pay no attention to her husband's fit. Why is the situation ironic?

60–68 She dismisses his hallucination as utter nonsense (**proper stuff**). His outbursts (**flaws and starts**) are the product of imaginary fears (**impostors to true fear**) and are unmanly, the kind of behavior described in a woman's story.

71–73 If burial vaults (**charnel houses**) give back the dead, then we may as well throw our bodies to the birds (**kites**), whose stomachs (**maws**) will become our tombs (**monuments**).

Lady Macbeth.

Fie, for shame!

- 75 **Macbeth.** Blood hath been shed ere now, i' th' olden time,
Ere humane statute purged the gentle weal;
Ay, and since too, murders have been performed
Too terrible for the ear. The time has been
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
80 And there an end. But now they rise again
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns
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.—

- 85 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.
Then I'll sit down.—Give me some wine. Fill full.

[*Enter Ghost.*]

- I drink to the general joy o' th' whole table
90 And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss.
Would he were here! To all and him we thirst, **F**
And all to all.

Lords. Our duties, and the pledge.

[*They raise their drinking cups.*]

Macbeth. [*To the Ghost*] Avaunt, and quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee.

- Thy bones are marrowless; thy blood is cold;
95 Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with.

Lady Macbeth. Think of this, good peers,
But as a thing of custom. 'Tis no other;
Only it spoils the pleasure of the time.

Macbeth. [*To the Ghost*] What man dare, I dare.

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

75–78 Macbeth desperately tries to justify his murder of Banquo. Murder has been common from ancient times to the present, though laws (**humane statute**) have tried to rid civilized society (**gentle weal**) of violence.

85 muse: wonder.

F DRAMATIC IRONY

Recognize the irony of Macbeth's remark about Banquo in line 91: "Would he were here!" How do you think an actor playing Macbeth should say this line?

93–96 **avaunt:** go away. Macbeth sees Banquo again. He tells Banquo that he is only a ghost, with unreal bones, cold blood, and no consciousness (**speculation**).

99–104 Macbeth would be willing to face Banquo in any other form, even his living self.

105–106 **If trembling . . . girl:** If I still tremble, call me a girl's doll.

[Ghost *exits*.]

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

Lady Macbeth. You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting
110 With most admired disorder.

Macbeth. Can such things be
And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder? You make me strange
Even to the disposition that I owe,
When now I think you can behold such sights
115 And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks
When mine is blanched 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,
120 But go at once.

Lennox. Good night, and better health
Attend his Majesty.

Lady Macbeth. A kind good night to all.
[Lords *and all but Macbeth and Lady Macbeth exit*.]

Macbeth. It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood.
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
Augurs and understood relations have
125 By maggot pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood.—What is the night?

Lady Macbeth. Almost at odds with morning, which is which.

Macbeth. How say'st thou that Macduff denies his person
At our great bidding?

Lady Macbeth. Did you send to him, sir?

130 **Macbeth.** I hear it by the way; but I will send.
There's not a one of them but in his house
I keep a servant fee'd. I will tomorrow
(And betimes I will) to the Weïrd Sisters.
More shall they speak, for now I am bent to know
135 By the worst means the worst. For mine own good,
All causes shall give way. I am in blood
Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,
140 Which must be acted ere they may be scanned.

110 admired: astonishing.

110–116 Macbeth is bewildered by his wife's calm. Her reaction makes him seem a stranger to himself (**strange even to the disposition that I owe**): she seems to be the one with all the courage, since he is white (**blanched**) with fear.

119 Stand . . . going: Don't worry about the proper formalities of leaving.

122–126 Macbeth fears that Banquo's murder (it) will be revenged by his own murder. Stones, trees, or talking birds (**maggot pies and choughs and rooks**) may reveal the hidden knowledge (**augurs**) of his guilt.

128–129 How say'st . . . bidding: What do you think of Macduff's refusal to come? *Why do you think Macbeth is suddenly so concerned about Macduff?*

131–132 Macbeth has paid (**fee'd**) household servants to spy on every noble, including Macduff.

133 betimes: early.

134 bent: determined.

135–140 Macbeth will do anything to protect himself. He has stepped so far into a river of blood that it would make no sense to turn back. He will act upon his unnatural (**strange**) thoughts without having examined (**scanned**) them.

Behind the Curtain

1985 poster for Verdi's opera *Macbeth*



Promotion

Flyers and posters are among the materials used for **promotion**, in order to attract an audience for a play. What ideas do each of these posters for *Macbeth* communicate about the play? Which poster grabs your attention most, and why?

Dalhousie University's 2005 production in Halifax, Nova Scotia



The Large Group's 2004 production in Auckland, New Zealand

Lady Macbeth. You lack the season of all natures, sleep.

Macbeth. Come, we'll to sleep. My strange and self-abuse
Is the initiate fear that wants hard use.
We are yet but young in deed.

[*They exit.*]

Scene 5 A heath.

The goddess of witchcraft, Hecate, scolds the three witches for dealing independently with Macbeth. She outlines their next meeting with him, planning to cause his downfall by making him overconfident. (Experts believe this scene was not written by Shakespeare but rather was added later.)

[*Thunder. Enter the three Witches, meeting Hecate.*]

First Witch. Why, how now, Hecate? You look angrily.

Hecate. Have I not reason, beldams as you are, **G**

Saucy and overbold, how did you dare
To trade and traffic with Macbeth

5 In riddles and affairs of death,

And I, the mistress of your charms,

The close contriver of all harms,

Was never called to bear my part

Or show the glory of our art?

10 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.

But make amends now. Get you gone,

15 And at the pit of Acheron

Meet me i' th' morning. Thither he

Will come to know his destiny.

Your vessels and your spells provide,

Your charms and everything beside.

20 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 profound.

25 I'll catch it ere it come to ground,

And that, distilled by magic sleights,

Shall raise such artificial sprites

As by the strength of their illusion

Shall draw him on to his confusion.

30 He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear

141 **season:** preservative.

142–144 His vision of the ghost (**strange and self-abuse**) is only the result of a beginner's fear (**initiate fear**), to be cured with practice (**hard use**).

2 **beldams:** hags.

G BLANK VERSE

Read aloud a few lines from Hecate's speech (lines 2–33). Note that they are not written in blank verse. Why might the **rhyme** and **rhythm** of these lines be appropriate for a witch?

13 **loves . . . you:** cares only about his own goals, not about you.

15 **Acheron:** a river in hell, according to Greek mythology. Hecate plans to hold their meeting in a hellish place.

20–21 **This . . . end:** Tonight I'm working for a disastrous (**dismal**) and fatal end for Macbeth.

23–29 Hecate will obtain a magical drop from the moon, treat it with secret art, and so create spirits (**artificial sprites**) that will lead Macbeth to his destruction (**confusion**).

His hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear.
And you all know, security
Is mortals' chiefest enemy. **H**

[*Music and a song*]

Hark! I am called. My little spirit, see,
35 Sits in a foggy cloud and stays for me.

[*Hecate exits.*]

[*Sing within "Come away, come away," etc.*]

First Witch. Come, let's make haste. She'll soon be back again.

[*They exit.*]

Scene 6 The palace at Forres.

Lennox and another Scottish lord review the events surrounding the murders of Duncan and Banquo, indirectly suggesting that Macbeth is both a murderer and a tyrant. It is reported that Macduff has gone to England, where Duncan's son Malcolm is staying with King Edward and raising an army to regain the Scottish throne. Macbeth, angered by Macduff's refusal to see him, is also preparing for war.

[*Enter Lennox and another Lord.*]

Lennox. My former speeches have but hit your thoughts,
Which can interpret farther. Only I say
Things have been strangely borne. The gracious Duncan
Was pitied of Macbeth; marry, he was dead.
5 And the right valiant Banquo walked too late,
Whom you may say, if 't please you, Fleance killed,
For Fleance fled. Men must not walk too late.
Who cannot want the thought how monstrous
It was for Malcolm and for Donalbain
10 To kill their gracious father? Damnèd fact,
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?
Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely, too,
15 For 'twould have angered any heart alive
To hear the men deny 't. So that I say
He has borne all things well. And I do think
That had he Duncan's sons under his key
(As, an 't please heaven, he shall not) they should find
20 What 'twere to kill a father. So should Fleance.
But peace. For from broad words, and 'cause he failed
His presence at the tyrant's feast, I hear
Macduff lives in disgrace. Sir, can you tell
Where he bestows himself?

H TRAGEDY

Reread lines 23–33. How does Hecate reveal herself to be Macbeth's **antagonist**?

34–35 Like the other witches, Hecate has a demon helper (**my little spirit**). At the end of her speech, she is raised by pulley to "the heavens" of the stage.

1–3 Lennox and the other lord have shared suspicions of Macbeth.

6–7 Lennox is being ironic when he says that fleeing the scene of the crime must make Fleance guilty of his father's murder.

8–10 He says that everyone agrees on the horror of Duncan's murder by his sons. But Lennox has been consistently ironic, claiming to believe in what is obviously false. His words indirectly blame Macbeth.

12 pious: holy.

15–16 Again, he is being ironic. If the servants had lived, Macbeth might have been discovered.

21 from broad words: because of his frank talk.

24 bestows himself: is staying.

Lord. The son of Duncan
 25 (From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth)
 Lives in the English court and is received
 Of the most pious Edward with such grace
 That the malevolence of fortune nothing
 Takes from his high respect. Thither Macduff
 30 Is gone to pray the holy king upon his aid
 To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward
 That, by the help of these (with Him above
 To ratify the work), we may again
 Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,
 35 Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,
 Do faithful homage, and receive free honors,
 All which we pine for now. And this report
 Hath so exasperate the King that he
 Prepares for some attempt of war.

Lennox. Sent he to Macduff?

40 **Lord.** He did, and with an absolute “Sir, not I,”
 The cloudy messenger turns me his back
 And hums, as who should say, “You’ll rue the time
 That clogs me with this answer.”

Lennox. And that well might
 Advise him to a caution t’ hold what distance
 45 His wisdom can provide. 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 accursed.

Lord. I’ll send my prayers with him.
 [*They exit.*]

25 Macbeth keeps Malcolm from his birthright. As the eldest son of Duncan, Malcolm should be king.

27 Edward: Edward the Confessor, king of England from 1042 to 1066, a man known for his virtue and religion.

28–29 that . . . respect: Though Malcolm suffers from bad fortune (the loss of the throne), he is respectfully treated by Edward.

29–37 Macduff wants the king to persuade the people of Northumberland and their earl, Siward, to join Malcolm’s cause.

40–43 The messenger, fearing Macbeth’s anger, was unhappy (**cloudy**) with Macduff’s refusal to cooperate. Because Macduff burdens (**clogs**) him with bad news, he will not hurry back.

Language Coach

Figures of Speech Shakespeare often uses a **figure of speech** in which a part stands for the whole. Reread lines 45–49. Who or what does *the hand accursed* (or “wicked hand”) stand for?



READING 4 Evaluate how the structure and elements of drama change in the works of British dramatists across literary periods.

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Whom does Macbeth command the two murderers to kill?
2. **Clarify** Why does Macbeth behave so strangely at the banquet?
3. **Summarize** In Scene 6, what does Lennox suggest about Macbeth?

Literary Analysis

4. **Examine Shakespearean Drama** Review the notes you recorded on Macbeth and Lady Macbeth in Act Three. What do their actions reveal about how their relationship has changed since the death of Duncan? Be specific.
5. **Interpret Character Motives** Reread Scene 1, lines 47–56. Why does Macbeth fear Banquo and feel threatened by his “being”? Support your answer.
6. **Compare Actions** Compare and contrast Duncan’s murder in Act Two with that of Banquo in Act Three. What does Banquo’s murder suggest about how Macbeth has been affected by his first crime?
7. **Analyze Shakespearean Tragedy** Skim Act Three for remarks that create **dramatic irony**. In a chart like the one shown, explain why the remarks are ironic by jotting down what characters think or say and what the audience knows. How does the dramatic irony enhance your enjoyment of the play?

Scene, Lines	What Characters Think or Say	What Audience Knows

8. **Analyze Theme** In which moments of Act Three is manhood equated with a lack of fear? How valid is this view of manhood?

Literary Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations** In Scene 1, Macbeth meets with two murderers, but three murderers take part in Banquo’s murder in Scene 3. Some people have speculated that the third murderer may be Macbeth himself. Is this plausible? Would that help explain his behavior at the banquet? Support your answer.

Can you ever be too **AMBITIOUS?**

Many characters pose a threat to Macbeth. Which characters in the play do you believe pose the greatest threat to him? Why?