

Macbeth Book Notes

Macbeth by William Shakespeare

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Author/Context

William Shakespeare was probably born April 23, 1564. Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, was a glover and wool dealer in Stratford who eventually became a town officer until 1577 when scholars conclude that some sort of financial difficulty must have made it impossible for Shakespeare to attend university. Shakespeare's education was limited to the local grammar school at Stratford-on-Avon.

At the age of eighteen, Shakespeare married Ann Hathaway, a woman eight years older than he. Six after their marriage their first daughter, Susanna, was born. In 1585 the twins, Judith and Hamnet, were born. There is a blank spot in Shakespeare's biography between 1585 and 1592 when he became known as a playwright because there is very little documentation of his life at that time. There is much speculation that Shakespeare's marriage was not a happy one because he spent most of the time after establishing himself as a dramatist in London while his wife and children remained in Stratford.

Once Shakespeare made a break into the acting and play-writing world in 1592 with the first three parts of Henry VI, he became a success. Shakespeare also published two poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), that made him known as a poet in addition to his mounting theatrical success. Shakespeare continued that rise to fame when he joined other great actors of the day in an acting company called the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The Lord Chamberlain's Men performed for Queen Elizabeth I on many occasions, and when James I took the English throne in 1603, he granted the Lord Chamberlain's Men a royal patent and they became the King's Men.

Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616 and is buried in the chancel of Trinity Church in Stratford. In 1632, two of Shakespeare's fellow actors published the First Folio, a posthumous collection of his works. This collection contains thirty-six of the thirty-seven plays that make up the Shakespeare canon today.

His works include *Henry VI* (1589-91), *Richard III* (1592-1593), *The Taming of the Shrew* (1593-1594), *Richard II* (1595), *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595-1596), *Romeo and Juliet* (1595-1596), *Julius Caesar* (1599), *Hamlet* (1600-1601), *Othello* (1604), *King Lear* (1605), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-1607), as well as many other historical plays and other minor comedies.

"[C]onsidered as a complete entity, the Shakespeare canon has over the centuries obtained an unparalleled critical significance and has exerted an unprecedented influence on the development of world literature."

"*Macbeth* survives only in the Folio collection of Shakespeare's work," which suggests that it wasn't one of the more popular plays during Shakespeare's time. But, according to historian Jacob Littleton, *Macbeth* gained popularity in the late 18th century and early 19th century Gothic era as well as in the late 19th century Victorian era. It is now one of the most frequently performed plays in the world.

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Plot Summary

Macbeth is a Scottish general who is loyal to Duncan, the Scottish king. But after Macbeth meets three witches who prophesy that Macbeth will be king, the general is no longer satisfied to remain loyal to his king.

Macbeth and his wife hatch a plot to kill the king under their own roof and frame the guards outside the king's bedroom for the murder. Although Macbeth has misgivings about killing the king, his wife convinces him that it is the thing to do. Macbeth kills Duncan with his wife's help, but he is plagued with guilt for the crime.

When Duncan's murdered body is discovered, Macbeth immediately kills the accused guards so that he can cover his tracks. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, flee Macbeth's castle in fear for their lives, and they are suspected of bribing the guards to kill their father.

Macbeth assumes the Scottish throne. In order to secure the throne for his descendants, he must kill Banquo, the other army general, and Banquo's son because the witches' told Macbeth that Banquo's descendants would have the throne after Macbeth. So Macbeth sets a trap and hires murderers to kill Banquo and his son, but Banquo's son escapes. Shortly after Banquo is killed on his way to a banquet at Macbeth's palace, Macbeth is haunted by Banquo's ghost. In the middle of the banquet he sees the ghost of the murdered man there and he makes a scene in front of the Scottish lords who are at the banquet. This outburst makes the lords suspicious although Lady Macbeth tries to play it off as just an illness that Macbeth has.

Meanwhile, Macduff, a Scottish noble who suspects that Macbeth murdered Duncan, goes to England to get help to reclaim the throne.

Macbeth goes to see the witches again to learn his fate. They tell him to beware Macduff; that he will not be defeated until Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane; and that Macbeth will not be killed by someone born of a woman. Macbeth takes all of these signs to mean that he is invincible.

In England Macduff and Malcolm, the rightful heir, ban together to fight Macbeth. When Macbeth learns of Macduff's treachery, he sends murderers to Macduff's home to kill his wife and children. When Macduff hears of this, his resolve to kill Macbeth grows even stronger.

With ten thousand English troops they go to fight Macbeth. Macbeth is unafraid until he learns that the troops have camouflaged themselves with wood from the Birnam forest and are moving toward Dunsinane. When Macbeth comes face to face with Macduff he learns that Macduff was removed from his mother's womb, and was, thus, never born. Macduff kills Macbeth and Malcolm is returned to the throne.

Major Characters

The Witches: The witches are the instigators of the play because their prophecies prompt Macbeth to action. They are three sisters who trick Macbeth into believing that he is invincible, which leads to his downfall.

Macbeth: Macbeth is a general of Duncan's army before he gets greedy and wants the crown for himself. He murders the king and Banquo, the other general, as well as having Macduff's entire family killed, all so that he can protect the crown. Despite his ruthlessness to keep his position, he is plagued by guilt for his crimes and as a result sees ghosts of his victims. Macbeth is killed by Macduff in battle.

Duncan: Duncan is the king of Scotland who is betrayed in the beginning of the play by the Thane of Cawdor. Duncan gives the traitor's title to Macbeth and foreshadows the general's betrayal. Macbeth murders Duncan and frames Duncan's guards for the murder.

Malcolm: Malcolm is Duncan's oldest son and heir to the Scottish throne. When his father is murdered, Malcolm and his brother flee Macbeth's castle. Malcolm goes to England to seek English help to regain the throne that is rightfully his. In the end, he is pronounced king, and order is restored.

Banquo: Banquo is a general of Duncan's army, and the witches prophesy that his descendants will rule Scotland after Macbeth is king. This prophecy makes Banquo an enemy to Macbeth, so Macbeth has Banquo murdered. Banquo's ghost haunts Macbeth at a banquet, and this vision makes the Scottish lords suspicious of their new king.

Lady Macbeth: Lady Macbeth is Macbeth's wife. She insists that he murder Duncan and take the throne for himself. She is the driving force behind Macbeth's plays for power, but in the end she drives herself mad because of her guilt over the murders. She kills herself.

Macduff: Macduff is a Scottish noble who suspects that Macbeth has murdered Duncan from the very beginning. When Macduff goes to England to support Malcolm, Macbeth has Macduff's entire family killed at their home. Macduff is the man who finally kills Macbeth in battle.

Minor Characters

Donalbain: Donalbain is the younger of Duncan's sons. He flees for Ireland after his father is murdered at Macbeth's castle in Inverness.

Lennox: Lennox is a Thane, a nobleman, of Scotland, seems to side with Macbeth for most of the play, but in the end he is with Malcolm and the English soldiers who are fighting against Macbeth.

Ross: Ross is a Thane, a nobleman, of Scotland.

Angus: Angus is a Thane, a nobleman, of Scotland.

Fleance: Fleance is Banquo's son and a threat to Macbeth because he is one of Banquo's descendants. Macbeth tries to have Fleance killed along with Banquo, but Fleance escapes.

Hecate: Hecate is the goddess of witchcraft who decides that Macbeth must be punished for his selfishness and greed. She is the one who makes the witches present Macbeth's fortune in a way that suggests success for him, but really outlines his downfall.

Lady Macduff: Lady Macduff is Macduff's wife. Macbeth had her and her children murdered in their castle at Fife because Macduff sided with Malcolm and went to England to help Malcolm garner support for a battle with Macbeth.

Siward: Siward is the Earl of Northumberland, general of the English forces, who helps Malcolm fight Macbeth.



Objects/Places

Forres: Forres is a castle in Scotland where Duncan lives. They are battling near his castle to ward off the Norwegian invaders. When Macbeth becomes king, he will live at Forres and Banquo will be murdered only a mile from the castle.

Prophecies: The witches' prophecy that Macbeth will become king of Scotland sets off Macbeth's murderous streak. The same prophecy named Banquo's descendants as the successors to the throne, and this made Banquo an enemy in Macbeth's eyes.

Inverness: Inverness is where Macbeth's castle is before he becomes king. This is where Macbeth and Lady Macbeth kill Duncan.

Fife: Fife is where Macduff and his family live. When Macduff leaves for England, he leaves his family unprotected at his castle in Fife, and Macbeth's hired thugs kill all of Macduff's kin there.

Banquo's Ghost: Banquo's ghost is a manifestation of Macbeth's guilty conscience. The ghost appears at a banquet at the Forres castle, and when Macbeth sees the ghost, it stirs suspicion in the thanes.

First Vision: The first vision warns Macbeth to beware Macduff. This vision is the most straightforward of the three because it is Macduff who kills Macbeth in the end.

Second Vision: The second vision tells Macbeth that no one of woman born will kill him. Macbeth takes that to mean that no one will kill him, but what it really means is that someone who was removed from his mother's womb early will kill Macbeth.

Third Vision: The third vision tells Macbeth that he will see his end only when Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane Hill. Macbeth believes that that means that he will never fall from the throne or be killed. However, the witches have set Macbeth up to be confident in his own invincibility when really he is near his end.

Birnam Wood: Birnam Wood is a forest near Dunsinane Hill. Malcolm's men disguise themselves with tree branches so that when they approach Macbeth's castle at Dunsinane, it looks as if the forest itself is moving and their numbers are concealed.

Dunsinane Hill: Dunsinane Hill is a hill on which Macbeth has a castle. This is where he stays to await Malcolm's troops.

Line of Kings: The vision of the line of kings that are Banquo's descendants shows Macbeth that it will not be his descendants who inherit the Scottish throne. But even seeing this, he does not realize that the confidence the other visions have inspired is false.

Blood: Lady Macbeth cannot wash the blood from her hands in her dreams. She keeps seeing the blood of Duncan on her hands as a manifestation of her guilt for her role in his murder.

Quotes

Quote 1: "When shall we three meet again / In thunder, lightning, or in rain?" Act 1, Scene 1, lines 1-2

Quote 2: "screw [his] courage to the sticking-place." Act 1, Scene 7, line 60

Quote 3: "not confessing / Their cruel parricide, filling their hearers / With strange invention." Act 3, Scene 1, lines 31-3

Quote 4: "Things without all remedy / Should be without regard: what's done is done." Act 3, Scene 2, lines 11-2

Quote 5: "And you all know, security / Is mortals' chiefest enemy." Act 3, Scene 5, lines 32-3

Quote 6: "Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn / The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth." Act 4, Scene 1, lines 79-81

Quote 7: "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him." Act 4, Scene 1, lines 92-4

Quote 8: "The flighty purpose never is o'ertook / Unless the deed go with it: from this moment / The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand." Act 4, Scene 1, lines 145-8

Quote 9: "when our actions do not, / Our fears do make us traitors." Act 4, Scene 2, lines 2-3

Quote 10: "Out damned spot! out, I say! . . . who would have thought the old man to have had so / much blood in him." Act 5, Scene 1, lines 34-9

Quote 11: "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." Act 5, Scene 5, lines 23-8



Topic Tracking: Betrayal

Act 1, Scene 2

Betrayal 1: Betrayal is an important part of the play because that is how the changes in power occur. Macbeth is rewarded for his loyalty to the king while the Thane of Cawdor is stripped of his title because of his betrayal.

Act 1, Scene 3

Betrayal 2: Both Banquo and Macbeth are slightly disturbed by the witches' predictions because they are afraid that it will trick them into betraying the king.

Act 1, Scene 4

Betrayal 3: Duncan is shocked by his misplaced trust in the Thane of Cawdor. He is hurt that someone close to him could turn on him like that, and this sets the stage for the disappointment and tragedy of Macbeth's betrayal.

Betrayal 4: Macbeth begins to plan his treachery against Duncan as soon as he sees that Malcolm stands in the way of Macbeth gaining the throne.

Act 1, Scene 5

Betrayal 5: Lady Macbeth happily jumps on the bandwagon to kill the king and take the throne. She has no qualms about the betrayal because it will lead to power.

Act 2, Scene 1

Betrayal 6: Banquo makes it clear that he has not interest in betraying Duncan, and it's almost as if he knows that Macbeth is plotting against the king.

Act 2, Scene 2

Betrayal 7: The betrayal against Duncan is complete when Macbeth murders him. Now Macbeth must frame the guards and try to cover up his crime, which can only lead to more murder.

Act 3, Scene 1

Betrayal 8: Macbeth begins to plan Banquo's death so that he can secure the throne for himself and his descendants.

Act 4, Scene 2

Betrayal 9: Macbeth has Lady Macduff and her children all killed because her husband went to England to find help against Macbeth. They were punished for Macduff's betrayal.

Act 5, Scene 8

Betrayal 10: Macbeth's betrayal is finally punished when Macduff cuts off his head and the throne is restored to Malcolm.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing

Act 1, Scene 1

Foreshadowing 1: Foreshadowing plays an important role in Macbeth because most of the action of the play is hinted at before it happens. The three witches have a heavy hand in the foreshadowing because their prophecies are the motivation for Macbeth's actions. Appearing in the first act of the play shows the significance of the witches and their prophetic powers.

Act 1, Scene 2

Foreshadowing 2: When Duncan awards Macbeth the title that has been taken from a traitor, Shakespeare hints that Macbeth will follow in Cawdor's footsteps and betray the king.

Act 1, Scene 3

Foreshadowing 3: Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches and hear their predictions. This is Shakespeare's way of preparing the audience for what is going to happen.

Act 2, Scene 3

Foreshadowing 4: Lennox tells of the mourning cries of birds that were believed to foreshadow death. These cries kept them awake all night, and signaled Duncan's death.

Act 2, Scene 4

Foreshadowing 5: The horses destroying one another foreshadowed Duncan's death for the characters in the play. It is only after the fact that the characters can see the events as foreshadowing, however. As the audience, the foreshadowing is much more obvious.

Act 3, Scene 1

Foreshadowing 6: Banquo remembers the witches' prophecy, and so he suspects that Macbeth has killed the king to get the throne. Banquo also knows that the witches said that his descendants would be king. This serves to remind that audience that Macbeth is not finished securing the throne, and we know that Banquo is now in danger.

Act 3, Scene 5

Foreshadowing 7: The words of the witches are a sneak-preview for the upcoming action of the play.

Act 4, Scene 1



Foreshadowing 8: This encounter with the witches sets Macbeth up to feel invincible. He thinks that he is seeing the glory of his future, but what they have really shown him is his downfall. They've just camouflaged it in a way that made him feel confident that he was safe and the throne secure.

Act 5, Scene 5

Foreshadowing 9: Macbeth has felt unworried by Malcolm's approaching army until he hears that it looks as if the Birnam wood is moving toward the castle. Macbeth realizes that part of the prophecy is coming true, but not in the way that he expected it to.

Act 5, Scene 8

Foreshadowing 10: When Macbeth learns that Macduff was removed from his mother's womb and not born, he realizes that the witches' foretold of his doom and not his success. His arrogance after hearing their prophecy has enabled his own defeat.



Topic Tracking: Guilt

Act 1, Scene 7

Guilt 1: Guilt has a large part in manipulating how Macbeth and his wife act after they have committed their crimes. It is their guilt that drives them both mad. Before they have even killed Duncan, Macbeth feels guilty and considers backing out of the murder, but Lady Macbeth won't let him.

Act 2, Scene 1

Guilt 2: Once again Macbeth sees that what he is doing is morally wrong, but he doesn't let that stop him. He kills the king despite his misgivings.

Act 2, Scene 2

Guilt 3: Macbeth begins hearing things as soon as the murder is completed. He cannot even pray because he is so guilt-ridden over his crime.

Act 2, Scene 3

Guilt 4: Lady Macbeth faints at the news that Duncan is dead. Whether it is a trick on her part to throw the others off the trail, or if she has finally seen the weight of the crime that she and her husband have committed is unspecified in the text. Either way, this action is either a realization of guilt or a disguise of it.

Act 3, Scene 2

Guilt 5: Lady Macbeth feels that her husband is thinking too much of his guilt and not enjoying his royalty as he should be.

Act 3, Scene 4

Guilt 6: Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost at the banquet table and it freaks him out. His guilty conscience is projecting visions of Banquo because he is responsible for the man's murder. Outbursts like these hint at his guilt and make the thanes suspicious of the new king.

Guilt 7: After Macbeth's breakdown in front of the thanes, Lady Macbeth tells him to get some rest. Macbeth hasn't been sleeping well because he feels so guilty.

Act 5, Scene 1

Guilt 8: Lady Macbeth's guilt is finally getting to her, too. She sleepwalks and tries to wash the blood from her hands. This routine and her sleep talking are manifestations and proof of her guilt.



Act 5, Scene 2

Guilt 9: Malcolm and the thanes who have sided with him have heard that Macbeth is going mad, and they assume that his madness is a result of the guilt for his crimes.

Act 5, Scene 5

Guilt 10: Lady Macbeth has died (perhaps suicide), and her guilt is believed to be the cause of her death. Her conscience got the better of her in the end.

Act 1, Scene 1

Three witches stand together in thunder and lightning. They ask, "When shall we three meet again / In thunder, lightning, or in rain?" Act 1, Scene 1, lines 1-2 The answer is that they shall meet Macbeth on the heath after all events have unfolded. With that decided, the three weird sisters leave.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 1

Act 1, Scene 2

At a camp near Forres, Duncan, King of Scotland, greets his sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, along with Lennox, a Scottish thane, or lord. The three men bring in a bleeding captain who has news of the war with Norway. The captain tells the king that Macbeth was fighting honorably against the Norwegian invaders last he saw. But the captain does not know the outcome of the battle. After the king sends the captain away to have his wounds tended, Ross and Angus, two other Scottish thanes, come in with news of victory over Norway. They also tell the king that the Thane of Cawdor turned traitor and sided with Norway during the battle. Duncan decides to give Cawdor's title to Macbeth for his valor and bravery in battle.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 2

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 1

Act 1, Scene 3

On a heath near Forres the three witches are gathered awaiting Macbeth. Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches as they leave the battle camp. The first witch hails Macbeth as the Thane of Glamis, which he was before he went into battle. Then the second witch hails him as the Thane of Cawdor, and the third calls him king. Macbeth is startled to be addressed this way, and Banquo tells him not to shirk from such promising prophecies. The witches then tell Banquo that although he will not be king, his descendants will be. Shortly after saying this, the witches disappear without giving the men an explanation of their predictions. When the witches are gone Ross and Angus come to Macbeth to tell him that the king has granted him the title of the Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth and Banquo are both surprised and excited to see that there is some truth in what the witches told them. But this prophecy also makes them a little nervous because they are afraid that they will be tricked into betraying Duncan to achieve the throne. Macbeth vows to let things happen as they will without his interference. If the witches' words are true they will come to pass without any help from Macbeth to speed them along.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 3

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 2

Act 1, Scene 4

At the palace at Forres Duncan hears of Cawdor's execution. Cawdor died without begging for mercy, and Duncan is shocked by his own misplaced trust. Such a deep betrayal makes him feel foolish. Macbeth and Banquo then arrive at the palace. Duncan thanks Macbeth for his loyalty and tells him that there is no way to repay him for his service.

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 3

Duncan then announces that his son, Malcolm, is to be the Prince of Cumberland and heir to the Scottish throne. Macbeth at once sees that Malcolm is blocking his path to the throne and preventing the witches' prophecy from coming true. Macbeth begins to desire the Scottish throne and realizes that in order to get it he will have to be devious. He leaves ahead of the other lords and the king in order to prepare his castle for Duncan's arrival.

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 4

Act 1, Scene 5

At Inverness in Macbeth's castle his wife, Lady Macbeth, reads a letter from her husband. His letter tells her of his encounter with the three witches on the heath and their predictions of his rise to power. Lady Macbeth resolves to make the prophecies true because she thinks that her husband lacks the wickedness or guts to do what will be necessary to take the throne. An attendant comes in as she is scheming and tells her that the king is on his way to Inverness and that Macbeth is riding ahead of them.

When Macbeth arrives his wife tells him that she read his letter and she will see to it that the witches are right about Macbeth's royalty. Lady Macbeth warns her husband to disguise his fear and deceit so that the king won't suspect that he is in danger while he is at Inverness for the night. She vows that the king will not live to see the morning and tells Macbeth to leave everything to her.

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 5

Act 1, Scene 6

Duncan and his sons arrive at Macbeth's castle with Banquo. Lady Macbeth greets the king and welcomes him to her home. After pleasantries are exchanged, Duncan asks to be led to her husband so Lady Macbeth escorts the king into the castle.

Act 1, Scene 7

Within the castle, Duncan eats and Macbeth leaves dinner to be off on his own. Macbeth is rethinking the plot to kill Duncan when Lady Macbeth comes in. She asks her husband why he's left dinner. Guessing at his fears, she tells him that he is a coward if he doesn't go through with the plan to kill Duncan while he sleeps, framing the drugged guards outside the king's bedroom. She tells her husband to "screw [his] courage to the sticking-place." Act 1, Scene 7, line 60 After this goading Macbeth agrees to kill Duncan that night and make himself king.

Topic Tracking: Guilt 1

Act 2, Scene 1

Banquo meets his son, Fleance, in the court of the castle in the middle of the night because he can't sleep. It's past midnight and Macbeth comes in. Banquo is surprised that Macbeth is still awake because Duncan is already in bed. Banquo tells Macbeth that he dreamed of the witches. Macbeth says that he wants to talk with Banquo sometime about the witches' prophecies. Banquo dodges the subject and is reluctant to discuss the predictions unless he can be sure that he can keep his conscience clear and maintain his loyalty to the king. Macbeth sends the reluctant Banquo off to bed then.

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 6

When Banquo and Fleance are gone Macbeth tells a servant to tell Lady Macbeth to prepare his "drink," which is the signal for drugging the soldiers outside Duncan's door.

As Macbeth waits for the signal from his wife, he imagines that he sees a dagger hovering in front of him. He sees the evilness of what is planned, but when the bell signals him to murder Duncan, Macbeth goes to complete the treachery against the king.

Topic Tracking: Guilt 2

Act 2, Scene 2

Lady Macbeth is excited by her role in the plot to kill Duncan. She has drugged the soldiers' wine, but when she hears movement, she thinks that one of them is awake. She worries that her cowardly husband won't be able to complete the murder. But she is relieved when she sees that the noise that she heard was her husband returning with the soldiers' daggers covered in blood.

Macbeth tells his wife that after he murdered Duncan, he heard Malcolm and Donalbain wake, and one of them shouted "Murder." Macbeth then heard them pray and, for the guilt of his sin, he could not even say 'Amen' to their prayer. Then he thought he heard a voice say that he had killed sleep and that he would sleep no more because of his crime. His imaginings reveal his fear, and he refuses to return the daggers to Duncan's body because he is afraid to look upon his crime. He's afraid that the stain of Duncan's blood will not clean off his hands. Lady Macbeth takes the daggers back to Duncan's body and smears the king's blood on the sleeping soldiers so that it incriminates them for the murder. She warns her husband that thinking about the murder will drive them insane. Suddenly there is a knock at the castle gates, so Macbeth and his wife hurry to change into their nightclothes and wash the blood from their hands.

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 7

Topic Tracking: Guilt 3

Act 2, Scene 3

Macduff and Lennox have arrived at Macbeth's castle with the other thanes, and they wake Macbeth with their knocking. Macduff explains that they've come to meet with Duncan as he ordered them to, so Macbeth leads the men to the king's room. He pretends that he believes that the king is still sleeping. When Macduff goes to wake the king Lennox tells Macbeth about the ominous bird calls believed to prophecy death that kept them awake through the night. Macduff comes out of the king's room yelling that the king has been murdered. Macbeth, acting shocked, enraged, and heartbroken, follows Lennox into the slain king's room. Macduff shouts for alarm bells to be rung to wake the castle because the king has been killed.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 4

Lady Macbeth, Malcolm, Donalbain, and Banquo come in and learn of Duncan's death. Lennox says that the guards appear to be the murderers because their clothes and swords were covered in blood. Lennox also notes that the guards appeared disoriented when they woke, as if they were delusional and dangerous. Macbeth tells them that he was so emotional over the king's death that he killed the guards without thinking. His love and his loyalty to Duncan precluded logic and reason.

Lady Macbeth faints and is helped away as the thanes decide to get dressed and then meet up again. Malcolm and Donalbain talk to each other when the thanes have gone. The king's sons are afraid that they are in danger because they are the heirs to the throne. For safety they decide that Malcolm will go to England and Donalbain to Ireland because they believe that the plot is not finished and they are the next targets. They sneak away from the castle before the thanes return.

Topic Tracking: Guilt 4

Act 2, Scene 4

Ross and an old man are outside Macbeth's castle discussing how Duncan's own prized horses broke out of their stalls and ate each other a few days before he was murdered. This seemed to foreshadow the king's unnatural death.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 5

Macduff tells Ross that Malcolm and Donalbain probably bribed the guards who murdered the king because the young men have fled the castle. The way that they left suggests guilt, so Macbeth inherits the throne. Macbeth will go to be coronated and Ross will go with him. Macduff, however, is returning to his home in Fife.



Act 3, Scene 1

Banquo enters the palace at Forres, and he is alone. He speaks to himself as if he is speaking to Macbeth when he says that Macbeth has gathered all the titles that the weird sisters foretold he would. He was the lord of Glamis, became the lord of Cawdor, and then king--fulfilling the witches' predictions. Banquo, however, suspects that Macbeth pushed the prophecy to fruition through foul play. But Banquo also remembers that the witches predicted that it would be Banquo's line that would succeed Macbeth on the Scottish throne.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 6

In the midst of these murmurings Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and the lords and attendants of the court all enter. Macbeth invites Banquo to attend a dinner banquet in the evening as an honored guest. The king and Lady Macbeth make a big production of their fondness for Banquo and the importance that he attend the evening feast. Banquo has business to take care of in another town so he must leave, but he gives Macbeth his word that he will arrive back at the palace in time for the dinner. Just before Banquo leaves Macbeth tells him that Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain have been in England and Ireland "not confessing / Their cruel parricide, filling their hearers / With strange invention." Act 3, Scene 1, lines 31-3

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 8

Banquo exits and Macbeth sends the other court attendants and lords to amuse themselves for the afternoon until dinner. Everyone except Macbeth and an attendant exit the stage. Macbeth asks the attendant if the men he sent for have arrived and are willing to do what he asks. The attendant, sure that these murderers will follow the king's orders, goes to fetch the murderers who are waiting outside the palace.

While the attendant is gone, Macbeth spouts off about the danger that Banquo poses to Macbeth's position as king. Macbeth also remembers the witches' prophecy that Banquo's line would rule Scotland after Macbeth, and so Macbeth knows that in order to prevent such a thing, he must destroy Banquo and his son, Fleance. Macbeth believes that Banquo has a royal and commanding air about him that threatens Macbeth more than the fear of murdering Banquo. To prevent Duncan's murder being wasted on Banquo's line, Macbeth knows that he must kill the lord and his son. That is why he has called upon the murderers who wait outside the palace.

The attendant brings in the two murderers. The king speaks with them recapping a conversation they had the day before about Banquo. Macbeth has convinced these beggars turned murderers that Banquo is responsible for their ill fortune. Macbeth goads them into a rage that demands Banquo's death and the death of his son, Fleance, to satisfy their vengeance. Macbeth tells the murderers that Banquo is also his own enemy. He explains that he wishes to see Banquo destroyed but cannot do so himself because of mutual, powerful friends who would be upset to see Banquo killed.

Therefore, Macbeth entreats the murderers to kill Banquo, their enemy as well as his, but to keep it under wraps that the king wanted Banquo dead. The murderers agree to lie in wait for Banquo and Fleance as they come back to the palace that night for the dinner that Macbeth has insisted that they attend. The trap is set.

Act 3, Scene 2

Lady Macbeth enters asking if Banquo has left the palace yet. Learning that Banquo is gone but will return again tonight, Lady Macbeth sends the servant to tell her husband that she wishes to speak with him in private. The servant goes to bring the king to his wife. Lady Macbeth feels that if her husband does not enjoy his royalty, then all of their deceit and treachery has been for nothing. If he does not seem happy, it would have been better if they had not killed the king to take his throne in the first place.

Topic Tracking: Guilt 5

When Macbeth enters the room, she asks him why he is still thinking about Duncan when nothing can be done to revive the murdered king. "Things without all remedy / Should be without regard: what's done is done." Act 3, Scene 2, lines 11-2 Macbeth responds that they have not yet finished securing his throne and they are not yet safe. He says that Duncan lying quiet in his grave has it better than Macbeth who lives in fear and guilt after murdering the king. Lady Macbeth asks him to at least fake cheerfulness at dinner that night so that his guests will feel at ease and suspect nothing. He promises his wife that he will pretend to be happy and at ease and tells her to play up to Banquo and to speak well of him so that no one will suspect the malice that both Macbeth and his lady feel toward him. Macbeth's only comfort is that Banquo and Fleance can be killed. He warns Lady Macbeth that before the night is over another terrible deed will be done, but he does not tell her of his conspiracy to kill Banquo and his son. Night begins to fall around the castle.

Act 3, Scene 3

The murderers wait in a park near the palace and a third joins them at Macbeth's order. As they wait, horses approach. They hear Banquo call for a light and then he and Fleance approach with a torch. The murderers leap from their hiding places and attack Banquo, but Fleance escapes. The murderers cannot find Fleance because the torch has been extinguished in the struggle. One of the murderers goes to the palace to tell Macbeth that Banquo is dead, but his son has escaped.

Act 3, Scene 4

Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, Lennox, Ross, and other lords and attendants are at the banquet in Macbeth's palace. Rather than sit at his place at the head of the table, Macbeth insists to sit among the lords while his wife sits on the dais. Macbeth bids the lords to seat themselves and insists that Lady Macbeth welcome their guests with a speech. She tells Macbeth to welcome them for her and he says that her heart welcomes them and their hearts return thanks for the welcome. He is too distracted to give a prolonged speech because one of the murderers has appeared in the doorway. He tells the lords that in a moment they will all drink together and then he walks to the doorway to talk with the murderer.

Macbeth is satisfied to see the blood on the murderer's face and learn that Banquo is dead. He believes that he can take care of Fleance in time, so he is not worried about the young man now. He tells the murderer that they will meet tomorrow. Lady Macbeth warns her husband that his lack of hospitality is ruining the banquet. She tells him that if the lords had wanted only to eat a meal, they could have stayed home to do that. They have joined him in the feast for his hospitality and the company of a host.

Rejoining the lords at dinner, Macbeth mentions that he wishes that Banquo were with them as he promised he would be. Lennox invites the king to sit with them, but Macbeth looks around the table and does not see an empty seat. Banquo's ghost is in the seat reserved for the king, and Macbeth doesn't realize that it is a ghost until Lennox again points to the seat as being empty. Macbeth asks who has brought the ghost and says that they cannot say that he did anything. He rambles on at the ghost while Lady Macbeth tries to play off his mutterings as a common illness that he has. She attempts to convince the lords that it is just a spell that will pass, telling them to wait only a moment and the king will be himself again. Then she tries to snap Macbeth out of his guilt-ridden panic so that he will not give them both away to the lords. She tells him that he acts like he is frightened by a superstitious ghost story. Macbeth rants on about the dead returning from their graves for only a moment more and then the ghost disappears. Macbeth is still bothered by the ghost and his own guilt, but Lady Macbeth convinces him to go back to the table with the lords and play off his outburst as an illness.

Topic Tracking: Guilt 6

Macbeth resumes the feast and is explaining his illness to the lords when the ghost reappears at the banquet. Macbeth speaks again to the ghost telling it to return to the grave and bother him no longer. The ghost vanishes again and Lady Macbeth tells her husband that he has ruined the light mood of their banquet. Looking at her composure he tells her that it disturbs him that she could look upon such sights (the ghosts of the people they have murdered) and maintain her composure while he is so afraid. When the lords begin to question Macbeth about what sights he means, Lady Macbeth sends them all away because she claims that her husband's health is deteriorating and their questions will only make his illness worse. The thanes leave Macbeth and his wife.

When they are alone, Macbeth tells his wife that the blood that has been shed at their hands will be avenged and their guilt will be discovered. Then he tells her that Macduff refused the invitation to dinner and he's not sure how to take the rebuff. He plans to send another invitation to Macduff tomorrow and also to visit the three witches to find out what his future is. He wants to know his fate, be it good or bad. He has schemes in his head that must be enacted before he is able to think too long on them and see the wrongness of his actions. Lady Macbeth tells him that what he needs more than anything else is sleep. He agrees that he needs rest because he has not rested well. The guilt of his actions keeps him awake because he is not yet an accomplished enough murderer to be able to ignore his conscience. They go to bed.

Topic Tracking: Guilt 7

Act 3, Scene 5

The three witches meet Hecate on a heath. Hecate is angry with the witches for telling Macbeth of his fortune without calling on her at all. She tells them that they have done all their work for a selfish man who thinks only of his own fortune. Hecate tells the witches to meet her in the morning because Macbeth will be coming back to them to learn more of his fate. The witches and Hecate shall enchant Macbeth to believe that his position is secure and assured, "And you all know, security / Is mortals' chiefest enemy." Act 3, Scene 5, lines 32-3 Hecate and the three witches depart.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 7

Act 3, Scene 6

Lennox and another unnamed lord discuss the events that have unfolded. Lennox seems to think that Fleance has killed his father just as Malcolm and Donalbain are assumed to have hired the guards to kill their father. He thinks that if Macbeth found Banquo's son or the sons of Duncan, he might tear them apart as he did the guards who were smeared in Duncan's blood. Lennox seems not to suspect Macbeth's real reason for murdering the guards nor why Macbeth would kill Fleance, Malcolm, or Donalbain.

Lennox asks the other thane if he knows that Macduff is now out of favor with the king because Macduff has voiced suspicion at Macbeth's ascension to the throne and because he refused to attend Macbeth's feast the previous night. The other lord explains that Malcolm has gone to England and has been welcomed there by the English king, Edward. Macduff went to ask Edward for help against Macbeth. Macbeth, upon hearing this news, prepares for battle.

Act 4, Scene 1

The three witches stand around a cauldron bubbling in a cavern with thunder in the background. They chant together as they concoct a potion or a brew. Hecate appears with them and tells them that their efforts shall be rewarded before she disappears again.

Macbeth comes to the cavern and demands answers to his questions about the future. The witches call upon their potion to answer his thoughts and questions. The witches tell Macbeth to watch and speak not because the questions in his mind are known. Their master will answer Macbeth with apparitions.

Thunder sounds and a vision of an armed head rises and tells Macbeth to beware of Macduff, the Thane of Fife. The vision disappears. Macbeth tries to ask another question of that vision, but one of the witches warns the king that these visions will not be commanded.

Thunder sounds and a second vision appears--a bloody child. The vision tells him, "Be bloody, bold, and resolute; laugh to scorn / The power of man, for none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth." Act 4, Scene 1, lines 79-81

Macbeth reasons that if none shall kill him, he should not fear Macduff. But just to be sure, and so that he might rest easy, Macbeth vows to kill Macduff anyway.

Thunder sounds a third time and a third and final vision appears. It is a child crowned that holds a tree in his hand. This final vision tells the king that "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him." Act 4, Scene 1, lines 92-4

Macbeth feels invincible at these tidings because no one can bid the forest to uproot. But Macbeth has another question that he insists the witches must answer. He wants to know if Banquo's line will ever hold the throne. Although the witches tell him to be satisfied with what he already knows, Macbeth insists they answer his last question. So they show him a line of eight kings. The last king has a glass in his hand, and Banquo's ghost follows the eighth king. Macbeth sees that all of these kings are of Banquo's line as the ghost smiles at him and points at the kings of his lineage. In the glass that the eighth holds are many more kings from Banquo's line. After answering his question, the witches, joined by Hecate, dance around and then vanish.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 8

Macbeth calls Lennox into the cave to ask if he saw the weird sisters leaving, and Lennox did not. But while Macbeth was meeting with the witches, several riders came to give him word that Macduff had fled to England. At this news Macbeth says, "The flighty purpose never is o'ertook / Unless the deed go with it: from this moment / The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand." Act 4, Scene 1, lines 145-8

With this Macbeth decides to go to Fife, Macduff's home, and murder Macduff's wife and children while he is away in England rallying forces against Macbeth.

Act 4, Scene 2

At Macduff's castle in Fife, Lady Macduff and her young son are talking with Ross. Lady Macduff is angry that her husband has fled and left his wife and children unprotected. She thinks her husband does not love them, and Ross tries to explain to her that her husband was wise to flee. Ross, however, does not tell her where her husband has gone. He is very secretive about her husband's purpose. Lady Macduff says that "when our actions do not, / Our fears do make us traitors." Act 4, Scene 2, lines 2-3 So whether her husband actually was a traitor and needed to flee or not, the fact that he has fled makes him seem a traitor. Ross cannot convince her that her husband has acted in wisdom, and so he leaves.

Lady Macduff tells her son that his father is dead, but the boy argues that if his father were dead, she would be weeping. She keeps insisting that his father is dead because he is a traitor. As they argue a messenger comes in and warns her that danger is coming toward the castle and that she should take her children and flee. She has nowhere to run to, and the murderers come in disguised in horrible masks. The murderers ask her where her husband is, and she tells him that she hopes that Macduff is in a place where they shall never find him. The murderers call Macduff a traitor and the young boy calls them liars. One of the murderers stabs the boy and kills him. Lady Macduff runs screaming 'Murder,' and the villains chase after her.

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 9

Act 4, Scene 3

Macduff arrives in England and speaks with Malcolm. Macduff encourages Malcolm to come fight and take back the throne that belongs to him. Malcolm, however, knows that before Macbeth took the throne, he and Macduff were close. Therefore, Malcolm feels the need to test Macduff's loyalty. Malcolm warns Macduff that he might not be any better a king than Macbeth. Then Malcolm makes up all of these vices and flaws that he claims to have that would make him a bad king. When Macduff says that his hopes are broken and that Scotland, under Macbeth, can no longer be his home, Malcolm sees that Macduff is trustworthy. Malcolm explains his test and assures Macduff that his hopes should live because he will be a worthy and honest king once he regains the throne that Macbeth stole away.

Ross comes in and they recognize him as a Scotsman because of his clothes. When they recognize his face, they are happy to see him to hear news of their country. But Ross' news is not happy news. He tells Macduff of the murder of his wife, children, and servants. Macduff is grief-stricken and vows to kill Macbeth in vengeance for the death of his entire family. His fury is fuel for their desire to defeat Macbeth. The three men prepare to join the English nobleman, Siward and his ten thousand soldiers that Edward, King of England, has offered to help the Scotsmen fight Macbeth and win back the throne for Malcolm.

Act 5, Scene 1

It is the middle of the night. A doctor and Lady Macbeth's servant woman whisper together in a room of the Dunsinane castle. The servant has called the doctor to observe Lady Macbeth's sleep walking. The queen rises from bed with her eyes open, as if she is awake, but she is still asleep and speaks strangely about blood on her hands. As the doctor watches, Lady Macbeth rubs her hands together as if washing them and cries, "Out damned spot! out, I say! . . . who would have thought the old man to have had so / much blood in him." Act 5, Scene 1, lines 34-9 Lady Macbeth speaks on about how she cannot cleanse her hands and she mentions the wife of Macduff and Banquo, practically admitting her guilt. The doctor tells the servant that guilty minds will often confess their secrets while they sleep, and so something of the same must be happening with Lady Macbeth. He tells the servant to keep an eye on Lady Macbeth. He also suggests that Lady Macbeth needs divine assistance, and not that of a physician, but he doesn't dare to speak more of what he has heard. With that advice, he leaves.

Topic Tracking: Guilt 8

Act 5, Scene 2

In the countryside near Dunsinane the Scottish lords who have joined against Macbeth are waiting for Malcolm, Macduff, and the English support that they will bring. Menteith, Caithness, Angus, and Lennox discuss what they know of Macbeth's preparations for battle. The king has fortified the Dunsinane castle, and they have heard word from those who hate Macbeth that he behaves madly. The lords decide amongst themselves that Macbeth's guilt has finally driven him crazy, and rightfully so because he has committed crimes so horrible that his own senses are reviled by his actions. The lords vow to fight for the rightful king, Malcolm, and to use all of their strength and ability to remove Macbeth from the throne. The lords and their soldiers march off to meet Malcolm and Macduff.

Topic Tracking: Guilt 9

Act 5, Scene 3

Macbeth is in a room in Dunsinane. A servant comes to update him on the opposing army's movements, and Macbeth mocks him and tells him that the movements of Malcolm's forces make little difference because he does not have to fear anyone born of a woman. Even then, he need not fear anyone until the Birnam wood moves to Dunsinane. The servant tells him, nonetheless, that the English force of ten thousand soldiers is on its way to the castle. Macbeth, although he should have no reason to fear because of the prophecies given to him by the three witches, calls for his armor-bearer to help him prepare for battle.

Macbeth asks the doctor about Lady Macbeth's condition, and the doctor claims that because the illness is caused by her own fantasies, he cannot ease the troubles that keep Lady Macbeth from rest. Macbeth asks him to find some way to root out the trouble so that Lady Macbeth can be healthy and happy again. While Macbeth repeats again the prophecy of the witches, the doctor whispers to the audience that if he could get away from Dunsinane now, there is no amount of money that would bring him back again.

Act 5, Scene 4

Malcolm and the Scottish thanes along with Siward and his son approach Birnam wood with their large army. Malcolm orders the men to each cut a bough from the forest trees and use it to disguise themselves so that Macbeth will not see them coming. The lords have learned from reports that Macbeth remains at Dunsinane and that his troops have dwindled because many of the men have revolted. The only men left to fight for Macbeth are men who had no other choice, and are therefore not so strong of heart as the men who fight for Malcolm because they want to. Malcolm and the lords are optimistic that Macbeth will be defeated, but they want to hold off on boasts until the battle has been won for certain.

Act 5, Scene 5

Macbeth is inside Dunsinane castle still confident that no matter what Malcolm's soldiers try, they can never kill him. He is speaking of his invincibility when a woman screams within the castle. Seyton, Macbeth's servant, goes to see what the noise was about. While he is gone Macbeth confesses that he has been a part of such great evil and seen such terrible sights that such screams no longer startle him. Seyton returns to tell Macbeth that Lady Macbeth has died. The king says that she should have died at a time when he could mourn her. "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." Act 5, Scene 5, lines 23-8

Topic Tracking: Guilt 10

A messenger runs in to tell Macbeth that as shocking as it seems, it looks as if Birnam wood itself is approaching Dunsinane. Macbeth begins to panic at the news because the prophecy of his downfall is beginning to unfold. He orders his men to put on their armor and prepare to fight so that at least they will die wearing their armor.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 9

Act 5, Scene 6

Malcolm and his troops are near the castle now, so he orders them to throw down their branches and prepare to fight. Siward and his son will lead the first charge, and Macduff orders the trumpets to sound to signal the beginning of the fight.

Act 5, Scene 7

On one part of the field Macbeth fights and he wonders at who was not of a woman born because that is the only person, according to the witches, that Macbeth need worry about. Siward's son approaches Macbeth and they fight. The younger man is killed, and Macbeth leaves that part of the battlefield. Macduff enters calling out for Macbeth so that he can avenge his family's destruction, but he cannot find the tyrant king.

Siward tells Malcolm that the castle has been surrendered, and that they have won the battle. The two men approach the castle gates and prepare to enter.

Act 5, Scene 8

Macduff finds Macbeth on the battlefield and challenges him, but Macbeth tries to tell him not to waste his time because no man of a woman born can kill Macbeth. As they fight each other, Macduff says that he was ripped from his mother's womb too early, and therefore was not of a woman born. Macbeth, seeing that he cannot win, still makes an attempt to avert his death as he fights against Macduff. He will not give up because he cannot be so humbled as to kiss Malcolm's feet. So they continue to fight to the death.

Topic Tracking: Foreshadowing 10

Malcolm, Siward, and other lords have gathered on another part of the field. Ross tells Siward that his son is dead. Although the man is sad for the loss, he believes that his son had a good and honorable death because he died bravely in battle. As they speak Macduff approaches with Macbeth's head.

Macduff hails Malcolm as the king of Scotland, and all the lords cheer their rightful king. Malcolm grants the title of earl to all of the lords who were loyal to him while Macbeth ruled. Now that Macbeth has been killed and his wife has killed herself, Malcolm says that he will call back to Scotland those who fled while Macbeth was ruler. So begins Malcolm's reign.

Topic Tracking: Betrayal 10