

Soliloquy

An act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers

Betrayal

The act of being disloyal to someone or something

Hubris

Excessive pride / arrogance

Kingship

The state, office, or dignity of a king

Masculinity

Qualities regarded as characteristic of men

Manipulation

controlling, or influencing of someone or something

Tyranny

Cruel and oppressive government or rule

Supernatural

Some force beyond scientific understanding

Ambition

A strong desire to do or achieve something

Plot

Driven by witches' prophecies and his wife's ambition, brave Scottish general Macbeth murders King Duncan to seize the throne. His tyrannical reign is marked by escalating paranoia, further murders (including Banquo and Macduff's family), and deep guilt that drives Lady Macbeth to madness. Though seemingly protected by ambiguous prophecies, Macbeth is ultimately defeated and killed by Macduff, restoring rightful kingship to Scotland.

Shakespearean Tragedy

Macbeth is a Shakespearean tragedy. Tragedies usually adhere to a set of conventions: The play centers around a tragic hero. Usually he is male, usually with high status at the start of the play and some moral virtues. Through a combination of the character's fatal flaw (their **hamartia**) and the intervention of fate, the character is set off on a path of self-destruction from which they cannot escape. They may have a moment of realisation in which they realise their mistake, but it is too late to turn back. The play ends with their death, and then the natural order is restored. Audiences were meant to feel a sense of **catharsis**—that is, they could experience the intense emotions of the plot without making the same mistakes as the protagonist. It might be useful to think about where in the plot of Macbeth these stages above occur and how Shakespeare portrays the various stages of Macbeth's downfall.

Key Quotes

"Fair is foul, and foul is fair" - The Witches (A1,S1)

"All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis! / All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor! / All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!" - The Witches (A1,S3)

"Stars, hide your fires; / Let not light see my black and deep desires." - Macbeth (A1,S4)

"Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here" - Lady Macbeth (A1, S5)

"Look like th' innocent flower, / But be the serpent under't." - Lady Macbeth (A1, S5)

"Is this a dagger which I see before me, / The handle toward my hand?" - Macbeth (A2, S1)

"A little water clears us of this deed." - Lady Macbeth (A2, S2)

"O, full of scorpions is my mind" - Macbeth (A3,S2)

"Out, damned spot! Out, I say!" - Lady Macbeth (A5,S1)

Context

King James I – Macbeth was written in 1606, early in the reign of James I, who succeeded to the English throne in 1603 after being King of Scotland. The play pays homage to the king's Scottish lineage and hatred of witches.

Additionally, the witches' prophecy that Banquo will found a line of kings is a nod to James' family's claim to have descended from the historical Banquo.



The Divine Right of Kings – the idea that kings got their power from God and not from their subject. James I was a believer in this, and the idea meant that any treasonous activity was a crime against

God.



The Great Chain of Being — A religious hierarchy where everything on earth was awarded a 'rank' / status. God was at the top, rocks & minerals at the bottom. A Jacobean audience believed that if this hierarchy was interfered with (i.e. a human tried to 'jump up' the ranks to above their status then the natural order would be thrown into chaos.

Shakespeare shows this on the night of the regicide when there is a violent storm. Macbeth's attempt to climb the 'Chain of Being' disturbs the natural world.



Gender – Macbeth and Lady Macbeth switch between having masculine and feminine characteristics. In the play, gender is often linked to ambition and a willingness to do anything to achieve power

How to structure a paragraph

Point: What is your impression of the character?

Evidence: Pick a quotation from the play that shows that.

Explain: How does that quotation create the impression?

Analyse: Can you pick out a specific word that creates that impression? Or a technique? **Why** do you think the writer wants us to feel that way?

Alternative: Give an alternative opinion, use an extra quote to reinforce your point here.

Link : What were Shakespeare's intentions when writing the play? How would a Jacobean audience react?

Key Themes

Violence



Appearance vs reality



Ambition

Guilt



Power

Macbeth

A captain in Duncan's army, later the Thane (Lord) of Glamis and Cawdor. When Three Witches predict that he will one day be king of Scotland, he takes his fate into his own hands, allowing his ambition and that of his wife's to overcome his better judgement.

Lady Macbeth

Macbeth's wife whose ambition helps to drive her husband toward the desperate act of regicide.

Macduff

Kills Macbeth. He remains the noble hero throughout and serves as a contrast to Macbeth.

King Duncan

King of Scotland. His victories against rebellious kinsmen and the Norwegians have made him a popular king.

Banquo

Macbeth's close friend and ally who also receives predictions from the witches.

Malcolm

Duncan's rightful heir. He leaves for England after his father's murder and enlists the support of the English king and English lords.