

## Macbeth Key Quotes & Important Shakespearean Elements of a Tragedy

### **Setting & Sound FX:**

- *'Thunder and lightning.'* **Stage Directions (1:1)**

**Style:** Pathetic fallacy foreshadows the tragic tone and tragic ending of this Shakespearean Tragedy.

**Theme(s):** Supernatural. Unnatural order of nature.

- *'Upon a heath'* – **Second Witch (1:1)**

**Style:** Setting portrays isolation. The tragic hero of a Shakespearean Tragedy will always end up isolating themselves because of their fatal flaw. Macbeth's being ambition.

**Theme(s):** Isolation is also a main theme throughout the play as the Witches continue to isolate Macbeth from his initial role as a loyal subject to Duncan and a loyal and kind husband.

- *'A knocking.'* **Stage Directions throughout the play.**

**Style:** Simple and effective sound effect. The knocking throughout the play foreshadows the beginning of the shattering of Macbeth's conscience and mind.

**Theme(s):** Guilt. Ambition (fatal flaw). Regicide.

- *Lady Macbeth Faints.* **Stage Directions (2.3)**

**Style:** This stage direction should be utilized in everything production of Macbeth. Lady Macbeth feigns shock and horror. As everyone discovers the death of King Duncan, she performs the role of the vulnerable, emotional female.

**Theme(s):** Appearance versus reality. Regicide.

## **The Witches:**

- *Fair is foul, and foul is fair. (1:1)*

**Style:** The supernatural was an element in all Shakespearean tragedies. Audiences were intrigued and fearful of such characters as Witchcraft was feared during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Many witch trials took place across the Americas and Europe with James 1<sup>st</sup> of England being a believer in witchcraft.

Paradox. This famous quote refers to the Witches confusing prophecies which hints to the audience that they may be meddling with Macbeth for no reason. They are always equivocating when communicating with Macbeth. The trochaic tetrameter also emphasizes the Witches strange, nonsensical dialogue.

**Theme(s):** Supernatural. Equivocation. Appearance versus reality.

- *'All hail Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!'* (1.3)

**Style:** Dramatic irony as the audience previously learned that the Thane of Cawdor is to be executed after committing treason during the battle. This new title of 'Thane' (equivalent to a 'Lord' in England) has already been designated to Macbeth by King Duncan. Thus, the Witches are already seen to be lying and equivocating. Are they able to truly control Macbeth's fate? Or are they merely placing the seeds of ambition for their own amusement?

**Theme(s):** Supernatural. Equivocation. Ambition.

- *'All hail Macbeth that shalt be king hereafter!'* (1.3)

**Style:** Dramatic irony. The audience already knows that the traitor, Thane of Cawdor, has been executed and now the Witches 'prophesize' that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and afterwards, King.

**Theme(s):** Equivocation. Supernatural. Ambition.

- *'None of woman born shall harm Macbeth.'* (4:1)

**Style:** The Witches evil intentions send Macbeth's ambition into overdrive as he now believes that no person can kill him, as we are all 'born of woman.' However, this is equivocation or a 'half-truth' as Macduff was 'untimely ripped' from his mother's womb. Thus, 'born of woman' meaning a natural birth.

**Theme(s):** Equivocation. Supernatural. Ambition.

- *'A child crowned with a tree in his hand.'* (4:1)

**Style:** Finally, a child wearing a crown (Malcolm, the rightful heir) and holding a tree appears. It says that Macbeth will not be defeated until Great Birnam Wood marches to Dunsinane Hill. Macbeth is pleased: since forests don't march, he must be invincible.

**Theme(s):** Equivocation. Supernatural. Ambition.

### **King Duncan:**

- *'O valiant cousin, worthy gentleman!'* (1:2)

**Style:** King Duncan's declaration about Macbeth. Proving Macbeth to be a good and loyal subject to King Duncan (set up as a hero to eventually become the tragic hero)

**Theme(s):** Loyalty. Kingship.

- *'There's no art to find the mind's construction in the face.'* (1:2)

**Style:** Introducing the theme of appearance versus reality. Duncan means that there is no way of knowing what a man is thinking just by looking at his face. Thus, foreshadowing Macbeth's thoughts of regicide because of the Witches prophecies and his wife's support.

**Theme(s):** Loyalty. Kingship. Regicide. Appearance versus reality.

- *'What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won.'* (1:2)

**Style:** Duncan is a good King (possibly in honor of King James 6<sup>th</sup> of Scotland and 1<sup>st</sup> of England. It is important to note that King James was also a patron of Shakespeare's theatre) Duncan trusts and praises Macbeth for his bravery and loyalty to his King. The audience is now aware that the title of Thane of Cawdor will be given to Macbeth (who is currently Thane of Glamis)

**Theme(s):** Loyalty. Kingship. Regicide. Appearance versus reality. Gender roles.

- *'This castle hath a pleasant seat.'* (1:6)

**Style:** Dramatic irony. The audience knows that sadly, King Duncan will be murdered within Macbeth's castle.

**Theme(s):** Loyalty. Kingship. Regicide. Appearance versus reality.

## **Macbeth:**

- *First introduced through hearsay via the Captain: 'Disdaining fortune with his brandish'd steel... Till he unseamed him from the nave to the chaps...as sparrows, eagles, or the hare the lion' (1:2)*

**Style:** Macbeth is introduced through hearsay to set his character up as a brave, violent warrior. Traits which would have been looked upon favorably by a Jacobean audience.

**Theme(s):** Bravery (valor). Predator versus prey. Violence/blood. Loyalty. Gender roles.

- *Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? (2:2)*

**Style:** The imagery of blood and violence runs throughout the play. This line presents the theme of possible guilt and the consequences of regicide. Macbeth had hoped that after he killed Duncan, all consequences would vanish, and no one would suspect him. Now it is the psychological guilt and further paranoia that fuels Macbeth's ambition to retain the title of King.

**Theme(s):** Regicide. Blood/violence.

- *Is this a dagger which I see before me,  
The handle toward my hand? ...Thou marshall'st me the way I was going. (2:1)*

**Style:** Soliloquy. This supernatural imagery can be interpreted differently in each production of Macbeth. Is it the Witches meddling with Macbeth and presenting this image to him? Or is this Macbeth hallucinating? Is this a vision which is borne from his extreme ambition to become King? Either way, the dagger points towards Duncan's chamber.

**Theme(s):** Supernatural. Regicide. Appearance versus reality.

- *'It will have blood they say. Blood will have blood.'* (3:5)

**Style:** Macbeth recalls an old saying that blood shed through violence seeks more blood in revenge, creating a cycle of bloodshed; he feels trapped in the inevitability of this violence. A signifier of Macbeth's downfall.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence.

- *'From this moment the very firstlings of my heart shall be the firstlings of my hand.'* (4:1)

**Style:** A contrast to Macbeth's thoughts earlier in the play, before he murdered King Duncan. Macbeth weighed up all consequences and even suggested that he had no specific intention to kill Duncan other than his ambition.

*'I have no spur*

*To prick the sides of my intent, but only*

*Vaulting ambition,'*

Now, however, he is acting without thought and his decisions are purely made by what he desires – to remain King, no matter what.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Ambition.

- *'She should have died hereafter' (5:5)*

**Style:** Macbeth's spiral into insanity, paranoia and bloodshed is shown here as he states that he has no time to grieve the death of his wife. A contrast to the beginning of the play when his wife was his *'Dearest partner of greatness.'*

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Ambition.

- *'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.'* (5:5)

**Style:** Soliloquy. Macbeth's description of the nature of life towards the end of the tragedy. He knows his wife, Lady Macbeth, has committed suicide and is imagining what his future will be like. Life, to him, is meaningless.

**Theme(s):** Ambition (fatal flaw). Blood/violence.

### **Lady Macbeth:**

- *'Too full of the milk of human kindness.'* (1:5)

**Style:** Soliloquy. Lady Macbeth is unsure whether Macbeth has the right amount of desire and ambition to commit regicide. At this point in the play, it appears that she is 'stronger' and more ambitious as she further convinces Macbeth to kill Duncan.

**Theme(s):** Ambition (fatal flaw). Blood/violence.

- *'Unsex me here.'* (1:5)

**Style:** Soliloquy. Lady Macbeth wishes to strip herself of her femininity and become more masculine. In Jacobean times, a man was to be strong and brave – as Lady Macbeth wishes to be, also. 'Macbeth' was set in Scotland in the 11<sup>th</sup> century when ideal male qualities were loyalty, bravery, strength and often violence. Desiring the opposite qualities of the ideal feminine, Lady Macbeth could also parallel the Witches here.

**Theme(s):** Ambition (fatal flaw). Gender roles. Supernatural.

- *'Look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under 't.'* (1:5)

**Style:** Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth to hide his 'deepest desires.' 'Serpent' could also symbolize devil/evil actions. Lady Macbeth is dominant here.

**Theme(s):** Appearance versus reality. Ambition. Gender roles.



- *'And dashed the brains out.'* (1:7)

**Style:** Lady Macbeth appears to be more capable of violence as she scolds Macbeth for considering going back on his promise to her to kill Duncan. She would have murdered their own child if he had asked her to do so. Baby killing could also be linked to Witches and witchcraft based on beliefs at the time. Obviously, the opposite of a caring and gentle mother.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Ambition. Supernatural. Gender roles.

- *'When you durst do it, then you were a man.'* (1:7)

**Style:** Lady Macbeth mocks Macbeth's masculinity. She attempts to emasculate him which only spurs him to commit regicide.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Ambition. Gender roles.

- *'Had he not resembled my father as he slept.'* (2:2)

**Style:** Lady Macbeth presents a vulnerable side. She was not capable of killing Duncan as he resembled her father.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Ambition. Gender roles.

- *'This is the very painting of your fear.'* (3:4)

**Style:** Lady Macbeth tries to settle Macbeth as he has visions of Banquo's ghost. The ghost could represent Macbeth's rapidly developing paranoia.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Ambition. Gender roles.

- *'Out damned spot! Out, I say!'* (5:1)

**Style:** Soliloquy. A famous line where Lady Macbeth is observed sleepwalking by the doctor and her lady in waiting. She admits to their sins as she imagines the symbolic blood never being able to be cleansed from her hands. The blood staining the hands is reference throughout the play and represents the guilt and consequences of committing regicide. Their hands will never be clean, nor will Macbeth ever sleep again as he has committed mortal sin.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Ambition.

## **Banquo:**

- *'These instruments of darkness tell us truths...to betray us in deepest consequences.'*  
(1.3)
- *'...look not like the inhabitants of the earth.'* (1.3)

**Style:** Banquo is a foil to Macbeth. He is like Macbeth regarding having valor and being violent, yet he remains good, honest and loyal throughout the play until his death. Banquo is a perceptive character.

**Theme(s):** Equivocation. Supernatural. Loyalty.

- *"There if I grow, / The harvest is your own" (1.4)*

**Style:** This quote shows how Banquo is a foil to Macbeth. Although some desires and thoughts are like Macbeth's, he remains loyal to his King. This quote means that if Banquo grows in the King's heart, the King will have himself to thank, for being a good king.

**Theme(s):** Kingship. Loyalty. Divine right of kings.

- *"A heavy summons lies like lead upon me, and yet I would not sleep" (2.1)*

**Style:** Just before Banquo heads to his chamber and Macbeth commits regicide. Banquo's observation that he's unable to sleep because of the dark thoughts he's having is interesting, because it foreshadows the trouble that Macbeth and his wife will have sleeping following the murders, they're responsible for.

**Theme(s):** The implication is that Banquo is already fearful of what Macbeth might do to become King. Macbeth is also aware that Banquo is suspicious of him as well as being paranoid about the Witches prophecy for Banquo.

- *'and I fear  
Thou played'st most foully for 't. (3.1)*

**Style:** Soliloquy. Expressing his suspicion of Macbeth to the audience.

**Theme(s):** Regicide. Appearance versus reality.

- *'New honors come upon him, / Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould /  
But with the aid of use' (1.3)*

**Style:** Soliloquy. Banquo recognizes that the new honor of King does not seem right. This title does not seem to 'fit' Macbeth, much like the 'strange garments' which do not correctly fit Macbeth. Nor does the title of King.

**Theme(s):** Kingship. Clothing.

## **MacDuff:**

- *'Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope  
The Lord's anointed temple,' (2.3)*

**Style:** It is significant that Macduff is the character who discovers Duncan has been murdered. He is the foil to Macbeth; he is the character that eventually kills Macbeth. References to religion here link to the Divine Right of Kings. The 'anointed temple' being the body of Duncan.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Ambition. Kingship. Loyalty. Divine right of kings.

- *'Feel it as a man' (4.3)*

**Style:** After Macduff receives the news that his family were 'savagely slaughtered' by a murderer Macbeth had sent. Macduff responds with great emotion (highly contrasted to how Macbeth later responds to his wife's death), and he allows this pain to convert to anger and drive to kill Macbeth.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Gender roles.

- *Bleed, bleed, poor country!  
Great tyranny, (4.3)*

**Style:** A loyal subject to his previous King. This line also shows great patriotism to Scotland and identifies Macbeth as a tyrant, not a King.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Ambition. Divine right of kings.

- *And let the angel whom thou still hast served  
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb  
Untimely ripped. (5:8)*

**Style:** Catharsis. A release of tension for the audience knowing that Macbeth can finally be killed. A shock revelation to both the audience and Macbeth. Macduff is a man who can kill Macbeth as he was not born of natural birth. Order is restored by the end of the play.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Supernatural.

### **Donalbain:**

- *'There's daggers in men's smiles. The near in blood, The nearer bloody.'* (2.3)

**Style:** Metaphor. There are evil men among them, even though they 'smile.' The sons of Duncan must now flee as they will be killed next as they are the rightful heirs to the throne 'The near in blood.'

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Appearance versus reality. Divine right of kings.

### **Malcolm (Rightful Heir):**

- *'Be this the whetstone of your sword. Let grief Convert to anger. Blunt not the heart, enrage it.'* (4.3)

**Style:** Malcolm's advice to Macduff after he hears of his family being murdered. They decide to gather an army together in England (King Edward The Confessor's military) to defeat Macbeth.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Divine Right of Kings.

- *'So, thanks to all at once and to each one,*

*Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone.'* (Final line of the play)

**Style:** As the rightful King, Malcolm says the final line in the play as order is restored.

**Theme(s):** Kingship. Divine right of kings.

### **Ross:**

- *'Savagely slaughtered...in one fell swoop.'* (4.3)

**Style:** Metaphor and sibilance. The devastating news delivered to Macduff sounds more sinister using sibilance and the metaphor referring to a predator, possibly a hawk or eagle, which has murdered the entire Macduff family in 'one fell swoop.'

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence.

### **Angus:**

- *'Those he commands move only in command, / Nothing in love: now does he feel his title / Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe / Upon a dwarfish thief'* (5:2)

**Style:** Angus confirms that anyone under Macbeth's command only 'move in command' and do as he says possibly out of fear, not out of love or loyalty like they had done with Duncan. Again, there are references here to the King's robes not correctly fitting Macbeth.

**Theme(s):** Blood/violence. Tyranny. Kingship. Divine right of kings.

### **Old Man:**

- *'A falcon, towering in her pride of place, was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.'*  
(2:4)

**Style:** A minor character reiterates the theme of the unnatural order of nature. This occurs just before Duncan's body is found.

**Theme(s):** Unnatural order or nature. Blood/violence.

### **Porter:**

- *'If a man were a porter of hell gate / he should have old turning the key.'* (2.3)

**Style:** Monologue. Comedic relief. The character of the Porter, who is the gate keeper to Macbeth's castle, provides comedic relief in the play. In this line he jokes that opening the gates for Macbeth's castle is like opening the gates of hell – he is constantly letting evil in and is getting tired because of it. This emphasises the evil sin that has just occurred within the castle walls.

The Porter appears in the scene which occurs after Macbeth has committed regicide. He facilitates the release of some tension for the audience as the scene which follows (3.3) is when Duncan's body is discovered. What dramatic effect might the Porter's scene have on the audience and the scene which follows?

**Theme(s):** Regicide. Blood/violence.



Elements	Explanation
Tragic Hero	A main character cursed by fate and possessed of a tragic flaw.
A Struggle Between Good and Evil	This struggle can take place as part of the plot or exist within the main character.
Hamartia	The fatal character flaw of the tragic hero.
Tragic Waste	The good being destroyed along with the bad at the resolution of the play. Often played out with the unnecessary loss of life, especially of "good guy" characters.
External Conflict	This can be a problem facing the hero as a result of the plot or a "bad guy" character.
Internal Conflict	The struggle the hero engages in with his/her fatal flaw.
Catharsis	The release of the audience's emotions through empathy with the characters.
Supernatural Elements	Magic, witchcraft, ghosts, etc.
Lack of Poetic Justice	Things end poorly for everyone, including the "good guys."
Comic Relief	One or more humorous characters who participate in scenes intended to lighten the mood.