

AQA English Literature GCSE

Macbeth: Character Profiles

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Macbeth

SYMBOLISES THE PERILS OF AMBITION

INTRODUCTION

Macbeth is the **eponymous** character of this Shakespearean tragedy. He is a **tragic hero**, meaning he starts out in a position of glory and success, but falls from grace due to an error in judgement of his own making. Every tragic hero has a fatal flaw, or **hamartia**: Macbeth's is his **unchecked ambition**. He can't restrain himself from going after what he wants, regardless of moral consequence.



When we are introduced to Macbeth, he is presented as the stereotypical hero, the ideal warrior. He fulfils the expectations of masculinity and proves his manhood. Shakespeare uses his **noble status** to give him a place to fall from. All tragic heroes have to start at the top, so that they can fall. Macbeth's journey from hero to villain, from brave warrior to coward, allows for an exploration of **gender**, **power**, and **morality**.

Macbeth's **tense**, **passionate** relationship with his wife also allows Shakespeare to examine **gender roles**, **marital relations**, and **power** in his own society. Because Macbeth allows himself to be overpowered by his wife, you could say that he takes a more feminine role in their marriage. He descends from a brave, masculine warrior to a **passive feminine coward**. Could this change in gender expression be linked to his villainy? If so, Shakespeare is suggesting that breaking the norms and order of society makes you vulnerable to corruption and temptation.

Macbeth's character is significant in terms of philosophy, religion, and morality. His personality is defined by both his **ambition** and his **guilt**. On the one hand he is fixated on the future he desires. On the other, he is constantly looking over his shoulder, haunted by his crimes. A question Shakespeare explores through Macbeth is one of **predestination**; Macbeth's life seems to be controlled by **fate**, but how much of Macbeth's story was foretold, and how much was of his own making? Was he destined to become a hellish villain, or was there anything he could have done to keep his place in Heaven?



CHARACTER IN CONTEXT

Gender

It would be easy if Macbeth was only used by Shakespeare to explore **masculinity**, but in practice, the gender performance associated with his character is much more **ambiguous**.

- Overwhelmingly, Shakespeare writes Macbeth to be a **symbol for toxic and repressive masculinity**, ultimately associating manhood with violence.
- At the same time, though, Macbeth's fear of being **emasculated**, and the 'feminine' traits he inherits at certain points in the play, means Shakespeare uses his character to **explore femininity**.

Initially, it seems like Macbeth has no reason to worry about his manhood. He is successful in battle, has a loyal wife, and is destined to work his way up the social ladder. But it quickly becomes apparent that this isn't enough for him. For Macbeth, the ideals of valour, power, and violence become **synonymous** with masculinity. He is convinced that if he doesn't pursue kingship as much as possible, he will be exposed as **effeminate**.

Also note how his relationship with Lady Macbeth influences his decisions, and how the **power dynamics** change as the play progresses.

- Macbeth, for most of the play, treats Lady Macbeth as his equal, or even his superior. He allows himself to be **manipulated** by her, because she has the power to strip him of his masculinity.

Ambition is his fatal flaw, but his disputed masculinity is his weakness. Any challenge to his manhood is enough to convince Macbeth of any crime. You could argue that what Macbeth's ambition strives for, more than to be king, is to be indisputably 'manly'.



Religion

As **Jacobeans England** was so deeply religious, it's no surprise that **faith** is mentioned in the play which is full of sinners and treachery. Macbeth rarely mentions God by name, but the idea of Heaven and Hell plays heavily on his mind. This suggests he is worried about the destination of his **immortal soul**.

- He mentions jumping "**the life to come**", implying he is sacrificing an eternal life in Heaven so that he can enjoy power and status during his finite life on Earth.

A significant part of Macbeth's character arc is how he **copes** (or tries to cope) with turning his back on God. While contemplating Duncan's murder, he acknowledges that Heaven will object



to his plans. He frets that Duncan's virtues as a good king will somehow cry out against the murder. This could refer to how his subjects will literally mourn his death, or it could be **metaphorical**: Macbeth may be worried that Heaven and Earth will react negatively to the murder.

Killing Duncan is a landmark decision in his **moral path**, as it is a **conscious choice** to put an end to his good ways and **embrace corrupt temptation**. Straight after the murder, Macbeth has a moral crisis and an identity crisis.

- One of the signs of his inability to cope is how he will "**sleep no more**".
- The other is that he could not "**say Amen**".

These affect Macbeth so deeply because they both demonstrate that life as he knows it is over. He will no longer live like the rest of humanity. He has strayed from God's path, and so has lost God's protection.

Setting - Scotland

Shakespeare constructs Scotland after the murder as a godless, Hellish land to match its king. Crops fail, strange cries fill the air, and the country lives in eternal darkness. Macbeth's mental state mirrors the state of his kingdom. Shakespeare suggests that living without God is the worst fate a man can have.



Homosociality & Male Friendship

Male friendships were a huge part of Jacobean culture. It was a **patriarchal society** where women were expected to stay at home, so the public domain was exclusively male. Men were business partners, colleagues, and school peers. Most of the time, a man's only company was other men. This meant men were **emotionally** and **psychologically** attuned to each other, and became very close.

The influence of **military standards** on society also meant that **male solidarity** and **loyalty** were important values. In battle, soldiers relied on each other, and desertion was unthinkable. The same rules applied to life outside of war.

Part of Macbeth's moral crisis comes from the ideal of male friendship. Killing Duncan means **betraying** a friend, relative, and his king. This goes against everything Macbeth has been taught to value and uphold. Similarly, killing Banquo is such a shocking act - particularly for a Jacobean audience - because Macbeth is supposed to be his closest friend. No one can suspect Macbeth at first because the idea of a man betraying another was preposterous.

Tragic Hero



The concept of the **tragic hero** was popular in Shakespeare's plays and in Renaissance theatre as a whole. There are several stages to a tragic hero's journey:

- The **hamartia**, or tragic flaw that causes their downfall.
- The **hubris**, or excessive pride and disrespect for the natural order
- **Peripeteia**, or reversal of fate
- **Anagnorisis**, or discovery
- **Nemesis**, or unavoidable punishment
- and finally **catharsis**, where the audience feels pity and fear for the protagonist in their undoing.

For Macbeth, his **hamartia** is his **unchecked ambition**. Shakespeare uses the idea of the tragic hero to teach his audience the **importance of morality**, and of respecting God's will. Having a tragic hero means the audience feels **sympathy** for them despite their failings.

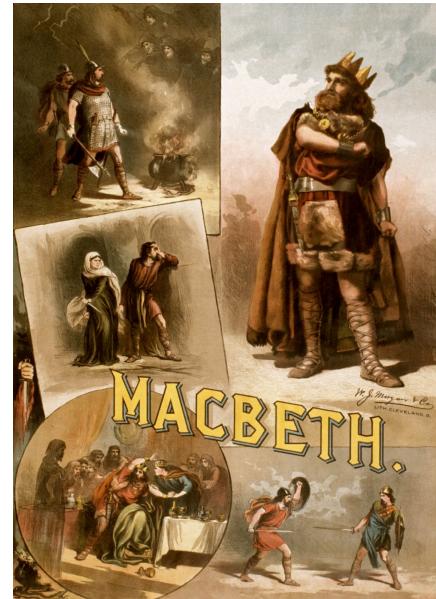
Shakespeare ensures we root for Macbeth, wanting him to succeed and avoid detection, even though we know what he's doing is wrong. This creates a big **moral crisis** for the audience, guaranteeing they will be more engaged with the topic and debate it. Our investment in Macbeth also makes his turn towards pure villainy more painful to bear. Even though we relate with his desires and are, to a certain extent, on his side, we are forced to admit that he is wrong, and that his tragic death is deserved and just.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Ambitious

Unchecked ambition is Macbeth's undoing in the play. If he had been patient, and waited for the title of king to come to him, he would have improved his position in society and kept his soul fit for Heaven. Under the forceful hand of Lady Macbeth, though, Macbeth gives into **temptation**. As a result, he ends the play in a much lower position than when he started. He loses grace, favour, and respect - from his peers and from the audience.

The issue, Shakespeare argues, isn't ambition itself, but the way Macbeth allows himself to be controlled by it. We know this because other characters, like Banquo and Malcolm, show ambition, but know how to restrain themselves. They can judge the situation, and recognise when it's best not to listen to their desires for the good of themselves, their loved ones, and the country they serve. Macbeth, on the other hand, is **oblivious to morality and natural order**.



Shakespeare shows his audience that ambition is a sin when it goes against God's will for the way things are meant to be. By killing Duncan to become king, Macbeth fights his way up the Chain of Being. Think of it like swimming in a river: Macbeth goes against the current, led by his ambition, and this is what is so dangerous and shocking. Shakespeare seems to want to teach his audience the **importance of self-awareness, conscience, and self-restraint**. You should be content with God's plans for you. You should control your ambition, and not let your ambition control you. At a time when people were plotting to kill the king and fear of espionage (spying) was rife, these were very relevant and important messages.

Guilty

Immediately after the murder, Macbeth becomes a man who is **guilt-ridden** and **tragically remorseful**. He has to live with what he's done, and with the knowledge that there is no undoing it. His guilt makes him a **nihilistic figure**, a character tormented by his own conscience. He is surrounded by blood, darkness, and death. Although unchecked ambition is what causes Macbeth's downfall, his guilt makes his undoing unbearable for him and the audience.

What might have been a historical or political play that follows the righteous uprising against a tyrannical king becomes a **psychological tragedy** because of how Shakespeare follows Macbeth's **mental state**. Macbeth's ambition propels him into **unescapable regret**, suggesting that the real punishment for regicide isn't execution, but guilt. Even when no one suspects him of foul play, Macbeth is troubled and cannot enjoy the life he sacrificed his immortal soul (what Christians believed lived on after death and went to Heaven or Hell) for. Shakespeare suggests that the conscience, or inner voice of God, that we all have ensures that no crime or sin can go unpunished. He proposes that no one can cope with the guilt our conscience creates, nor can we live with the knowledge of our own evil.



Violent

The play of 'Macbeth' is filled with **violence** and **conflict**, both **internal** and **external**. No one suffers more from this than Macbeth himself. The smallest scale of conflict he endures is his **internal conflict**, and the largest is the conflict between **free will and fate** that takes over the whole universe. Similarly, the conflicts between **good and evil**, between the **supernatural and the natural**, and between **appearances and reality**, go beyond Macbeth and rage across Scotland.



Violence is largely associated with **manhood** and **masculinity**, particularly by Macbeth. Whenever his manliness is challenged, Macbeth responds by committing a violent, ruthless act. He represses any feelings of fear or doubt, viewing them as signs of **weakness** and **femininity**. Furthermore, cruelty and violence are linked with **masculine ideals of honour and bravery**. Men are supposed to be noble and strong leaders, and Macbeth interprets this as bloodlust. Shakespeare could be implying that ideals such as bravery and honour are used to disguise injustice. Warfare and violence are presented as necessary and respectable measures, allowing men to follow selfish emotion rather than selfless logic.

Importantly, Shakespeare demonstrates how violence and bloodshed are used to **maintain tyranny and corruption**. They are **tools** for bad kings. Unlike Duncan's reign, which is portrayed as a nurturing, fruitful harvest, Macbeth's is plagued by disease and murder. If he was an effective ruler who obtained his power through fair means, he wouldn't need to use violence to protect himself. As it is, his power is wrongly gained, and his **reign is corrupt**.

- He declares that "**blood will have blood**". Shakespeare argues that violence breeds more violence. Macbeth is trapped in a **cycle** of bloodshed and conflict.

Macbeth, furthermore, is at the centrepiece of the power plays. In many ways, what matters more in the play is the **fight for power**, rather than the power itself. There is a constant **push and pull** between the main players, as each tries to keep hold of power. Shakespeare portrays power as being elusive and tricky - its possession can't be guaranteed. This is what drives men insane: they crave power, but what they have is never enough, and they live with the constant threat of losing it all. Macbeth is an example of this. He kills for more and more power, finding that what he already has isn't enough to satisfy himself. Again, he is trapped in a **cycle of his own making**.

KEY MOMENTS

Beginning (1.1 - 2.2)

We never really get to see what Macbeth is like at the very beginning of the play. The first time he's on stage, he meets the Witches, and their prophecies are the **catalyst** (cause) for his change in character.

From what we hear of him, Macbeth sounds like an impressive man. The determined way he fights for Scotland in battle suggests bravery, skill, and loyalty to his country. However, for the opening scenes Macbeth's character is plagued with **inconsistencies** and **contradictions**. We get the impression we are watching two different personalities fighting it out in front of us, each corresponding to a different destiny.

- The idea of murdering Duncan surprises and shocks him, as if the suggestion came from a different person altogether.



- With each scene that passes, he seems to have made the opposite choice to the scene before. His main **soliloquies** are **full of debate, deliberation, and anxiety**.

Already, we see a glimpse of the guilt that will haunt him after the murder takes place. We see his **moral compass** and **conscience** have a voice, but there are also moments where he seems heartless and dead set on being king regardless of consequence. Right up until he kills Duncan, it's not impossible that he could back out.

Another key trait that defines Macbeth's character in the opening scenes is his **weak will**. He takes the opinions and suggestions of others to heart and can't avoid being manipulated by them. Lady Macbeth, in particular, holds a lot of power over him. Linked to this is his **fragile sense of masculinity**. It's clear that Macbeth will do whatever it takes to prove himself and his manliness. You could argue that his weak will is entwined with his ambition, which is typically named as his **fatal flaw**. His ambition for power ties in with his **deflated ego**. The power he craves isn't supernatural or physical. What he wants is the title of king and the recognition it brings. Being king means his peers - and his wife - will have to respect him. It will be a testament to his masculinity, the ultimate proof of manly strength.

Middle (2.3 - 3.4)

Macbeth's **crisis of character** is at its most extreme during the middle of the play. The attributes and skills he possessed at the start don't make an appearance: he is **cowardly, indecisive, paranoid**. Most significantly, he is **consumed by guilt**.

- The conflict between ambition and conscience has evolved into a conflict between ambition and guilt.
- He deeply regrets what he's done and cannot bear to face it, yet another part of him isn't satisfied.
- His ambition drives him further and further into bloodshed and betrayal.

Macbeth's seemingly **inexorable** (unstoppable) descent into violence could also be attributed to his **paranoia**. As we discovered before, Macbeth's **public image** is very important to him, because it helps him believe he's still a good man. Though he kills people in cold blood, he doesn't do it without a reason. At least, in his eyes, he has a good reason. And that reason is always **protection**. Anyone who could defeat him or expose him is killed.

Part of what makes his guilt so difficult to bear is his revelation that power doesn't come with a guarantee. Murdering Duncan has taken a great toll on him, and he knows it, so he is frustrated that he put himself through so much for nothing. He believes he has to keep fighting to keep hold of his power.

As Act 3 comes to a close, Macbeth comes to a **resolution**. He decides to embrace his new life of violence, believing he has to see it through to the end. It's clear Macbeth thinks he has paid the price of murder by sacrificing his innocence and peace of mind, and he needs to make it worth the cost. This perspective marks the third and final part of his character development as we enter the final scenes of the play.



Ending (3.5 - 5.9)

As with the rest of the play, in the final acts it seems like two different Macbeths walk the stage. One is **violent and ruthless**, hellbent on furthering his own power and status, no matter the cost. The other is **dejected, dispirited**, and **nihilistic**, someone who knows his power is meaningless and is haunted by his own mortality, but can't do anything about either. He is friendless, loveless, and hopeless, as Shakespeare shows that killing your king and going against God will bring nothing but **misery** and **suffering**.

Undoubtedly, Macbeth has become a tyrant. To repress all feelings of guilt and regret, he **embraces violence and greed**. He wants to feel invincible and unstoppable - like God.

- We hear from his subjects and from Malcolm and Macduff that Scotland is in ruins because of Macbeth's brutal ruling style.
- We also know that, eventually, all of his followers and men betray him.
- Because he's not an authentic king, Shakespeare demonstrates that he can't inspire any authentic feelings of loyalty or love.

Macbeth's behaviour and actions give the impression that he doesn't care what anyone thinks of him. He believes he's above criticism or condemnation because he's king, and fortune is on his side.

Similarly, Macbeth's **hubris** peaks in Act 4, as he believes he is **immune to fate and higher powers**.

Hecate tells us as such when she addresses the Witches. Macbeth has lost sight of his humanity and weaknesses, so that he's possessed by arrogance, confidence, and pride.

- His slaughtering of Macduff's innocent family implies he believes he shouldn't be limited by moral or social rules, and exploits his power as king to kill whenever he pleases.
- The way he immediately resorts to murder suggests he has an exaggerated view of his own importance, because he acts as if his slight discomfort warrants bloodshed.

The battle that closes the play gives us an opportunity to directly compare how Macbeth behaves at the beginning and end. Some of the same qualities of bravery, righteous violence, and determination have resurfaced by Act 5, but he's a different, broken man. He has lost everything and everyone: an army of one, fighting for himself rather than for his king and country.



RELATIONSHIPS

Lady Macbeth | Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are incredibly **ambitious** and **power-hungry**. Most of what we see of their marriage is their **plotting and conspiring**. Both are **weakened by guilt and paranoia** as the plot develops, and by the end have isolated themselves from each other. The main difference between them is their confidence: Lady Macbeth is **determined**, **ruthless**, **strong-willed**, and **self-assured**, whereas Macbeth is **uncertain**, **weak-willed**, and **hesitant**.



The **power dynamic** between them switches. Initially, Lady Macbeth holds the power in their relationship, despite being in an inferior position according to society. She relies on Macbeth for power and status, but controls Macbeth like he's her own puppet. Eventually, Macbeth breaks away from her, plotting without her and keeping secrets.

Duncan | Both Duncan and Macbeth are kings of Scotland, but one is the rightful king, while the other is a detested tyrant. Duncan is renowned for his fatherly love and attention for his subjects, whereas Macbeth's reign is associated with Hell and the Devil.

At first, they appear to be on the same side. Macbeth is Duncan's loyal Thane, someone Duncan relies on for guidance and protection, and Macbeth is proud to serve his king and country. Duncan's trust in Macbeth is misplaced, as Macbeth's loyalty is weak.

Malcom | Just like Macbeth, Malcolm wants to be king. Unlike Macbeth, Malcolm is the **rightful heir to the throne**, and has been chased away from what's his by Macbeth's actions. Macbeth is associated with disorder, chaos, and sin, while Malcolm is a **symbol for peace, purity, and order**.

Macduff | Macduff is Macbeth's **foil** in the play, meaning **he highlights the flaws Macbeth has**. Both start out as Duncan's Thanes and are highly respected in the courts and in battle, but when Macbeth takes the throne, Macduff suspects him. Macduff chooses allegiance to his country, unlike Macbeth, and runs to England to join Malcolm. He is a **symbol for honour, nobility, and selflessness**.

Banquo | Banquo is Macbeth's best friend, another highly respected soldier. He, too, hears the Witches' prophecies, but chooses honour and loyalty over power. He resists his greed and temptations. He is physical proof of Macbeth's corruption and paranoia. He shows it's possible to hear such promising prophecies and not turn to murder, and his inside knowledge of Macbeth means he can expose him.



Macbeth's decision to murder Banquo, someone who meant a great deal to him, shows how **overwhelmed** he is by ambition and paranoia. The **memory** of the murder is something he can't live with, as shown by the appearance of Banquo's accusatory, blood-stained ghost.

Another difference between Banquo and Macbeth is highlighted in the Witches' prophecies. Though he won't be king himself, his sons will be kings. The Witches say he will be happier and greater than Macbeth. Therefore, Banquo is a **symbol for honour, loyalty, and prosperity**: his legacy is much better than Macbeth's.

KEY QUOTES

***"I have no spur / To prick the sides of my intent, but only / Vaulting ambition
which o'erleaps itself / And falls on th'other."*** - Macbeth, (A1S7)

- Macbeth knows that the only argument for killing Duncan is to **satisfy his ambition**. He also knows that blindly obeying ambition will end in disaster. The phrase "**o'erleaps itself / And falls on th'other**" suggests ambition makes people think illogically, so that they overestimate their own abilities and get ahead of themselves. Additionally, it portrays ambition as **self-destructive**. It "**o'erleaps itself**" rather than having someone or something else make it "**o'erleap**".
- The **metaphor** of horse-racing continues throughout this whole line of thought, mimicking the way people treat life as a race or competition. The **motif** evokes the sense of a rush to the finish, with everyone panicked as they chase down power and success.
- In the **metaphor**, Macbeth sees himself as both jockey and horse. Shakespeare could be implying that Macbeth is trying to control his ambition, but feels like his ambition will end up controlling him. As he is reduced from the jockey to the horse, he becomes more **animalistic**.
- This reflects the way the Jacobean believed the only thing that separated humans from animals was **reason or logic**. If a man lost his reason and acted irrationally, he was a beast. Macbeth is aware that ambition can make him act mindlessly, in the same way an animal would.



"For brave Macbeth - well he deserves that name - / Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel, / Which smoked with bloody execution, / Like Valour's minion carved out his passage / Till he faced the slave, / Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him, / Till he unseamed him from the nave to th'chaps / And fixed his head upon our battlements." - Captain, (A1S2)

- This recount of the battle against Norway and the rebels portrays Macbeth as the hero Scotland needs. He is “**brave**” and highly skilled with his sword - both **traits** typically associated with **heroism**. Shakespeare shows how violence and bloodshed are romanticised in the context of war, with impressive **imagery** such as “**disdaining Fortune**” and “**smoked with bloody execution**”. Because Macbeth is fighting for his country, his actions are righteous and honourable. It’s interesting to note how, when he behaves in the same ruthless way later in the play, he’s viewed as tyrannical and horrific. Shakespeare could be **criticising** the **culture of aggressive masculinity** and **honourable warfare**.
- The **metaphor** “**smoked with bloody execution**” implies violence is a **destructive force**, like fire. Shakespeare combines smoke and blood, two **motifs** that recur throughout the play and are linked to Macbeth’s guilt. The **imagery** could be an **allusion** to the flaming swords featured in the Bible.
- Angels and other representatives of God were granted flaming swords - for example to guard the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve were thrown out. This link portrays Macbeth as a soldier of God, suggesting he fights on the side of good and has God’s blessing. Shakespeare shows how highly respected and admired Macbeth was by his peers.
- Macbeth is referred to with the **simile** “**like Valour’s minion**”, portraying him as the **epitome of courage and chivalry**. “**Valour**” refers to a demonstration of courage in the face of danger, especially in battle, while “**minion**” suggests a loyal follower. This implies Macbeth can be trusted because he will always show courage in battle, and is dedicated to victory in the face of defeat. He is a saving grace for Scotland. Alternatively, “**minion**” **connotes** a slave or an unimportant servant. This would mean Macbeth is the inferior servant of a greater power, in this case Valour. This implies he will blindly turn to violence and conflict, and foreshadows his vicious and brutal ambition.
- Another interesting aspect of this quote is how it perfectly summarises the events of the play. Describing how Macbeth is “**disdaining Fortune**” alludes to his later hubris and defiance as he tries to dodge destiny. The description of how he



ruthlessly and mercilessly slaughters his opposition, “**unseam[ing] him from the nave to th'chaps**”, predicts his **tyrannical behaviour** as he chooses to murder any possible threat to his power. Lastly, the traitorous Macdonald has “**his head fixed upon [the] battlements**”. The same fate meets Macbeth in the final scene of the play. This implies that Macbeth had the ability to be evil within him all along. Alternatively, Shakespeare may be demonstrating how evil will always be punished. The balance between good and evil is maintained, so the same paths are followed again and again as God keeps order.

“Stars, hide your fires; / Let not light see my black and deep desires: / The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be, / Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.” - Macbeth (A1S4)

- This quote exemplifies the contradictory, fragmented nature of Macbeth’s character. The **duality** between light and dark, such as “**stars**” and “**black and deep desires**”, is a **symbol** for the conflict between Macbeth’s conscience, or moral compass, and his ambition. Here, he finally admits to himself that he wants to become king no matter what, but isn’t prepared to face the reality of what that means. The **metaphor** “**the eye wink at the hand**” is a synecdoche, which is a literary technique where **a part is used to represent the whole**. In this case, the “**eye**” represents Macbeth’s consciousness or awareness - his mind - while the “**hand**” represents his actions and reality. He wants to turn a blind eye to his own murderous deeds. Despite it being what “**the eye fears**”, he wants it to be “**done**”. This **paradox** causes a lot of **tension** and tragedy for Macbeth. It’s impossible to be unaware of your own actions, but he is torn apart in his attempts to do just that.

- The phrase “**stars, hide your fires**” could refer to several things. Firstly, the “**stars**” might represent the gods or the heavens. In this case, Macbeth doesn’t want them to see his sins, in the hopes that he will still be blessed by them and have salvation. Equally, he fears their judgement and disappointment. Similarly, “**stars**” could be previous heroes. It was common in mythology for heroes to be immortalised in the stars, like with constellations. Macbeth still wants his chance at being a hero to his country. Alternatively, asking the “**stars**” to “**hide [their] fires**” could show how Macbeth wants to operate in darkness. This means he can avoid detection from others, but more importantly, doesn’t have to witness his own corruption and villainy.



"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." - Macbeth (A5S5)

- Macbeth knows his end is near at this point in the play. The change in tone and the pathos (feeling of pity and sadness) this whole soliloquy evokes gives the impression that Macbeth has suddenly awakened from his stupor. His wife is dead, his kingdom is falling apart, and he is truly alone. All his ambition and sacrifice has been for nothing.
- The **imagery** and **metaphors** used in this excerpt emphasise how **life is a facade**, with no purpose or meaning to it. The **nouns** "**candle**", "**shadow**", "**player**", and "**tale**" all **connote** imitation and emptiness. Also, they are all temporary or delicate. Shakespeare suggests that everyone is **insignificant**, a mere candle flame compared to the light of the whole universe. The **semantic field of facade** could show how people, particularly Macbeth, focus on the wrong things in life, so that they are looking at "**shadow[s]**" or "**tale[s]**" rather than the reality.
- Macbeth has been so fixated on his ambition and power that he has missed what really matters - or, in a more **nihilistic interpretation**, he never realised that nothing really matters. His ambition can't live on past his death, and nor can his power. His crisis is caused by the undeniable truth of his own mortality, which nothing can contend with. For all his "**sound and fury**" - his violence and painful guilt - he has accomplished nothing everlasting: it signifies "**nothing**".
- The extended **metaphor** of theatre is a meta (self-aware) technique by Shakespeare, almost breaking the fourth wall. He suggests that everything is playing a part rather than being their authentic selves, so that appearances don't match reality. For Macbeth, he was playing the part of a moral and righteous servant, when really he was a murderer. You could also argue he was playing the part of being the chosen king. Another implication of this **motif** links to the **influence of fate and fortune**. No one is in charge of their own lives: like Macbeth, their lives are dictated by external forces.



Lady Macbeth

SYMBOLISES APPEARANCES VS REALITY

INTRODUCTION

Lady Macbeth can be viewed as an **antagonist** because of how she drives her husband, Macbeth, towards murder and bloodshed despite his protests. Alternatively, she can be viewed as a **tragic heroine**, meaning she starts out in a position of glory and success but falls from grace due to an error in judgement of her own making.

Lady Macbeth is the wife of a Thane, so her husband owns land given to him by the king. She can't possess any land herself, but she lives in luxury and has a good reputation. It's possible that she had children at one point, but at the time of the play she's childless and we don't see any of her family.



After receiving a letter from Macbeth that informs her of the Witches' prophecies, she is determined for Macbeth to become King. She worries that Macbeth is too tame and hesitant to do it himself, so commits to mocking and tempting him until he gives in. After Duncan's murder, she **grows more anxious and blunt**, but is kept out of most of her husband's actions and plots. Ultimately, she is broken by grief and guilt and takes her own life.

There is a lot of debate about what **motivates** Lady Macbeth in ensuring her husband becomes King. One argument is that, traditionally, **wives had to be supportive of their husbands' careers and aspirations**. By pushing Macbeth to be king, Lady Macbeth could be **fulfilling her role as the devoted, helpful wife**. It's also a demonstration of her love for Macbeth, as she wants him to succeed. Alternatively, her motivation is **her own ambitions and goals**. Her position as a woman in society means her own career prospects are limited, so the only way to move up the social ladder is for Macbeth to. **She wants to be queen** and reap the benefits of Macbeth's successes. Furthermore, becoming queen could be compensation for her lost children. If we do conclude that she had children but they died in infancy, then Lady Macbeth has lost her 'purpose' as a woman.

APPEARANCE

One of Shakespeare's resounding messages in the play of 'Macbeth' is that **nothing is as it seems**. Appearances cannot be trusted as they rarely match up with reality. One of the most significant, and destructive, examples of this is the character of Lady Macbeth.



Lady Macbeth's main role in the play is to shake things up and cause havoc, meaning her aim is to fool and manipulate as many people as possible with her deceitful ways. She benefits hugely from the **divide between appearances and reality**. Furthermore, she relies on people's prejudices and assumptions to get away with her actions. For example, the male characters see she is a woman so assume she would not get involved with violence, these **miscalculations** of her character allow her to get away with a lot.

Some would argue she uses her **feminine wiles** to persuade Macbeth to kill for her: either way, the social conventions surrounding gender come to her advantage. Something she tells



Macbeth over and over is to make sure he puts on a **facade** for other people. She believes that as long as they can maintain their deceitful masks, they will get away with murder and so much more. Of course, she underestimates the power of her own remorse.

Another way Lady Macbeth exploits appearances is by **transferring her desires and plans into Macbeth**. She is the villain kept behind the scenes. Though Macbeth is the one acting and killing, he is fulfilling Lady Macbeth's wishes. It is as if she has possessed him, or transformed herself into him through persuasion. It looks like Macbeth is the murderer, but in reality she is.

Lady Macbeth's **manipulation of appearances** is the connection between her and the Witches. In fact, like the Witches, her **gender identity is ambiguous**. On the outside, she looks feminine, but if her spells were successful, then she is wombless and full of gall on the inside.

Lady Macbeth isn't even fully honest to her husband. Only we, the audience, know the extent of her plots and motivations. By allowing us to **hear her soliloquies**, Shakespeare emphasises the **divide between appearances and reality** and how extreme her deceit really is. Other characters on stage are oblivious of who she really is, but we know the dark truth. Moreover, as the plot develops, Lady Macbeth's own **sense of self deteriorates**. Her suffering, torment, and hallucinations could all be side effects of her **fragmented self**. She has manipulated her identity so much that she is no one at all.



CHARACTER IN CONTEXT

Femme Fatales

Otherwise known as the maneater or vamp, this is a **common archetype** for female characters in literature and art. The term refers to a woman who is **mysterious and seductive**, using her charm to ensnare men and lead them into dangerous or deadly situations. Typically, **femme fatales are villains** and create a sense of unease for other characters and the audience.

Common traits include **heightened sexuality** and a **rejection of motherhood**. This was seen as particularly threatening because by rejecting motherhood, a femme fatale is denying a man his immortality and ability to leave a legacy, ultimately leading to the destruction of all men.

Overall, the key aspect of a femme fatale is her **use of feminine wiles** (e.g. beauty or sexual allure) to exploit men and accomplish her own goals. Shakespeare uses these aspects of the **femme fatale archetype** in the character of Lady Macbeth. She threatens to **emasculate** Macbeth, and uses her power over him as his wife to get her own way. Some productions of 'Macbeth' even show Lady Macbeth using sexuality and seduction to explicitly manipulate her husband. All of this is for her own ulterior motives, and clearly she drives Macbeth to his own death. More so than warning of the dangers of unrestrained female sexuality, though, Shakespeare seems to be demonstrating the **dangers of unrestrained female ambition and power**.

Eve and the Fall of Man

The theme of 'The Fall', particularly of man, is used a lot in literature, and is linked to the concept of the **tragic hero**. The Fall is an **archetype** where a character descends from a higher to a lower state, often because something happens to them that means they **lose their innocence** and happiness. Typically, the character is kicked out of their 'paradise' as a punishment for their actions. Commonly, a woman is responsible for the fall of an honourable man.

- The most famous example of this is Eve, in the story of the Garden of Eden. The story given in the Bible goes that, when the world was first created by God, Adam and Eve lived with Him in the Garden of Eden. They were told not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, and for a while they obeyed and lived in harmony. However, Satan came to the Garden disguised in the form of a serpent: he tempted Eve into eating the Forbidden Fruit. After she ate it, she convinced her husband, Adam, to do the same. They lost their innocence, and when God found out, he expelled them from the Garden.
- ◆ There are many **parallels** between Lady Macbeth's story, the archetype of 'The Fall', and the Biblical tale of the Garden of Eden. You could even say there are parallels between how Eve was historically viewed as the cause of mankind's Fall, and the way Lady Macbeth's character has been interpreted as being the **root of Macbeth's evil**.



Arthurian Legend

Arthurian Legend refers to the legends of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. These stories were incredibly popular, and were seen as examples for **ideal kingship** and **chivalry**. King Arthur was brave, noble, kind, and loving. His knights, too, were chivalrous, adventurous, and determined to protect their kingdom. Lady Macbeth takes a similar role to Morgan le Fay: she is the lover of the story's main hero, but she is also his downfall.

Marriage and Motherhood

In the Jacobean Era, women had no legal rights in society, and this meant that when they married, they became the property of their husbands. Their role was to have children and run the household. Domestic abuse, and even domestic murder, was extremely common. Maternal mortality (how common it was for a woman to die from pregnancy, childbirth, or the period after birth) was also extremely high. A woman's destiny was to get married and have children. Any education she was offered was geared towards these two occupations: women were taught to cook and clean, and for the upper classes, they might be taught to dance or embroider, all in the hopes of attracting a man. Men were entitled to divorce or disown their wives at any time if they felt she had dishonoured them, disobeyed them, or brought shame to their reputation.

In 'Macbeth', Shakespeare allows us to see how Lady Macbeth copes with these aspects of life for women in the Middle Ages. Within her marriage, she is a **dominant figure** with her own clear identity and purpose. Outside of her marriage, she is viewed only as Macbeth's wife and a good host. Her relationship with motherhood is much more complicated. It seems like, at some point, she had children, but they must have died, as there are no signs of children when the play unfolds. She tries to banish all her reproductive organs from her body, rejecting the role of mother altogether.

Gender

Whether Shakespeare intends to show the **perils of femininity** or of androgyny through Lady Macbeth depends on how successful you think her prayers to the spirits were. If we are to believe she was successful in unsexing herself, then her villainy and disturbing personality suggest that **gender nonconformity** is dangerous. By losing her feminine identity, she loses her humanity. Alternatively, if we still view her as a female character, her acts of manipulation and seduction portray women as deceitful, wicked beings.

She also plays a pivotal role in Macbeth's **perception** of his own gender. Her highly critical attacks on his manhood, and her **perception of masculinity** as violent, drives Macbeth to murder and tyranny. This adds to Shakespeare's **exploration of manliness**.

Lady Macbeth is a very **unconventional female character** by traditional and Jacobean standards. She is given **multiple soliloquies** - something that usually only male characters were allowed. When Shakespeare first introduces her to us, she has the dominant role in her marriage, which would have been unheard of. Rather than appearing weak or idiotic, she is smart, cunning, and bloodthirsty, and embraces the occult and villainy in order to achieve her



goal. She is so powerful that a Jacobean audience would view her as unnatural, possibly even **supernatural**.

Shakespeare suggests through her character that giving women power is dangerous and unnatural. It also appears that the only way for a woman to be so brutal and strong is to be evil and supernatural, which is why she prays to evil spirits. Her character allows Shakespeare to examine gender roles, marital relations, and the division of power in his society.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Ambitious:** Lady Macbeth's ambition is much more intense and violent than Macbeth's. She doesn't hesitate or deliberate: immediately she decides to pursue the promise of Macbeth's kingship. She **craves power** and, later, protection. She has been a 'weak' woman all her life, and now is her chance to answer her desires and reach her full potential. Her **ambition is infectious**. How authentic or committed Lady Macbeth's ambition is appears unclear. She speaks in a very violent, brutal fashion, but never acts on these impulses. Her words aren't supported by her actions. Plus, she admits that she can't bear looking at Duncan's corpse because he resembles her father.
- How successful her wish to be "**unsex[ed]**" and made cruel was is questionable. After Duncan's murder, she loses a lot of her confidence. Her ambition disappears, and she is fixated on her **paranoia**. It seems her ambition was all bravado. Lady Macbeth is quite a frightening character because of how she commits herself entirely to her ambition. Ambition for her is an **act of sacrifice**: she abandons all hopes of virtue or salvation by calling upon evil spirits. Like with Macbeth, Shakespeare argues that ambition itself isn't the issue, but the way Lady Macbeth embraces its control. On the other hand, Lady Macbeth doesn't care for morality and natural order. She doesn't care for other people: they're just obstacles to her goal.
- **Supernatural:** There's a lot of evidence for Lady Macbeth being the fourth Witch (excluding Hecate), but unlike the three Macbeth meets on the heath, Lady Macbeth is instrumental in planting the idea of murder in his head. She speaks in **rhyming couplets** while persuading Macbeth to agree to her plan, and her command of rhetoric and manipulation **imitates the Witches' spells** and trickery. Equally, her plan rests on her ability to use facade to manipulate reality, meaning her relationship with appearance vs. reality is similar to the Witches'.



- Her **subversion of femininity** was, in Jacobean times, more than enough evidence that she was a witch. Shakespeare implies her unnatural power as a woman is due to her **supernatural** links. Lady Macbeth could be called the ‘creator of evil’ in Macbeth. She is the main conspirator out of the Macbeths, and plants the idea of evil in Macbeth’s mind. The methods she uses to manipulate him hold explicit links to the supernatural. She wants to “**pour [her] spirits in [his] ear**”, an **allusion to demonic possession**.
 - This quote also connotes the story of the Garden of Eden, where the serpent tempted Eve to sin, and Eve then whispered in Adam’s ear so that he might join her. Lady Macbeth can be viewed as an imitation of Pandora from Roman mythology: Pandora opened the box that brought all evil and sin into the world. Shakespeare associates the Fall of Man with seduction, femininity, and the supernatural.
- **Guilty:** Guilt and remorse are the undoing of Lady Macbeth, leading her to her death. Unlike Macbeth, she isn’t killed after an uprising: she kills herself. Her mind is her enemy. Her ambition took her down violent paths that she couldn’t cope with, and Shakespeare suggests guilt and regret are the most destructive consequences of that. Everyone underestimates the power of their own conscience. The **insanity** and **torment** she feels at the hand of her guilt is punishment for her villainy.
- At first, Lady Macbeth shows no signs of guilt or remorse. In fact, she’s the one telling Macbeth off for worrying and panicking. She is convinced that washing the blood off their hands will free them from their deeds altogether, assuming that there will be no lasting impacts. This might also suggest that she is incapable of seeing how murder has psychological consequences. To her, the only link to the murder is the literal blood on her hands. She fails to anticipate that the murder will live with her beyond that night. This shows how she views herself to be cruel and ruthless. She represses any morality she has. Alternatively, this may reveal how desperate she is to put the murder behind her and continue with her life as normal.
- The act of washing your hands of blood becomes **symbolic** in the play. Shakespeare uses it to show how guilt persists beyond physical evidence. Lady Macbeth’s bold words “**a little water clears us of this deed**” come back to bite her, as in her final scene, we watch her repeatedly try to wash invisible blood off her hands. However, there are signs early on that Lady Macbeth isn’t as tough and cold-hearted as she wants to appear. She never refers explicitly to the murder or to blood: she uses euphemisms, such as “**deed**” and “**great business**”. This implies she can’t confront reality, and can’t face the grotesque or macabre. Shakespeare argues that guilt is the direct opposite of ambition. One focuses on the future, the other on the past. Ambition longs for power regardless of consequence, whereas guilt forces us to face the reality of our deeds.



CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

Beginning (1.1 - 2.1)

Lady Macbeth's most striking and significant performances happen at the beginning of the play. From them, we get a clear idea of who she is - or, arguably, who she wants to be. Her first lines are a **soliloquy**, demonstrating her **importance and strength of will**. Though she doesn't appear on stage until the 5th scene, she has a large impact on the direction the plot takes, and it is her plots and wishes that get fulfilled in the first two acts.



Lady Macbeth's speech at the beginning of the play is littered with deceit, treachery, and omens of death. The prospect of being queen and controlling the fate of another empowers her, and she doesn't want anything to come between her and the crown. Violence and cruelty are a means to an end for her because they bring her closer to getting what she wants and allow her to prove herself. Alternatively, you could argue that there are signs Lady Macbeth enjoys gratuitous violence - violence for the sake of violence. She knows that Macbeth will become king regardless of her own actions, but opts for the murderous route to the throne. She vows to smash a baby's head open for Macbeth as a sign of loyalty, despite him never asking for her to do such a thing. Both interpretations explain why Lady Macbeth doesn't care about moral consequence: her bloodlust and her selfish persistence leave no room for others and their feelings.

Shakespeare most wants to convey that Lady Macbeth's character is her ability to **manipulate**, **tempt**, and **seduce**. She is the root of Macbeth's evil, and this comes hand in hand with her supernatural contacts. It isn't just significant that she has soliloquies in her first scenes: the **allusions to witchcraft** and the **diabolical** portray her as a villain, and it's as if she's **casting her own spells**. She wants the power of the occult to achieve her aim, suggesting she is willing to sacrifice everything to be queen.

She bullies Macbeth with cruel and cutting insults, but also entices him with promises of power and success. The way she greets him, calling him a soon-to-be king, mimics the Witches' own. After Macbeth's soliloquy where he concludes that he has "**no spur to prick the sides of [his] intent, but only / Vaulting ambition**", Lady Macbeth appears on stage, suggesting that she is that very "**spur**", "**vaulting ambition**" personified. This all means she knows his weaknesses and temptations, and exploits them for her own gain. He has no hope of beating her. She is the Serpent and Eve combined, the call of the Sirens luring sailors to their graves.



Middle (2.2 - 3.4)

In the climax of the murder in Act 2 Scene 2, we see how Lady Macbeth takes charge and remains calm while Macbeth has a personal crisis. This elaborates on what we saw in the first act: Lady Macbeth is in control and is the dominant planner out of the two Macbeths. Except for one moment of honesty when she admits she couldn't kill Duncan because he looks like her father, she is cold and unruffled, completely **remorseless** and ruthless.

She is frustrated with Macbeth because of his guilt, hysteria, and fear - something that happens continually for the rest of the middle section - portraying her as **unempathetic** and closed-off. It's as if her spells were successful and she is an invincible, **amoral villain**, presenting her as a Witch. To her, guilt goes as far as the blood on her hands, and can be disposed of just as easily. The **contrast** between her and Macbeth's reactions - her coldness against his panic - makes her appear far-removed from humanity and its worries. On the other hand, her one display of **emotional vulnerability** could **foreshadow** her guilt and torment later.



In Act 2 Scene 3, Lady Macbeth gets a chance to demonstrate her acting skills. So far, her plan is chillingly successful. The way she feigns grief and manages to fool everyone in the vicinity with her performance suggests she has an uncanny ability to imitate and replicate human emotion. As an audience, we learn that she is an **unreliable character**: we don't know how much of what she says and does is genuine.

As we enter Act 3, we see cracks starting to appear in Lady Macbeth's calm. She's still **unaffected by guilt**, but she's **paranoid**. Moreover, she's **anxious** about how Macbeth is faring. His own paranoia and guilt are causes of great concern for her, and she doesn't want his incompetence to ruin her plan. This tension and frustration comes to a head when Banquo's ghost appears. She can't understand why Macbeth is behaving the way he is, and is angry that he would be so terrified by something so foolish, putting her in danger by doing so. She **mocks** and **chastises** him (tells him off) for displaying weakness, implying she's very passionate about keeping in control.

Despite her best efforts, we see Macbeth spinning out of control and away from Lady Macbeth's grasp. She can't stop him from seeing ghosts. She knows they need to be wary of Banquo, but Macbeth won't tell her what he has planned. By the end of the banquet scene, we know that the two are on separate paths, each isolated in their paranoia despite having the same fears. The Lady Macbeth we saw in Act 1, the wife who had an unbreakable hold over her husband, is nowhere to be seen.



Ending (3.5 - 5.9)

We next see Lady Macbeth on stage in Act 5 Scene 1. This is also the last time she ever appears before her death. The person we see is even further away from the person who plotted the death of a king in Act 1: she is entirely **absorbed in her fear**, talking to herself while oblivious to her surroundings. Her last line in the banquet scene was “**you lack the season of all natures, sleep**”, so it’s fitting that now she paces at night, sleepwalking but unable to rest. Finally, her sins have caught up to her.

Shakespeare uses the characters of the doctor and Lady Macbeth’s Lady in Waiting to emphasise how insane and alien Lady Macbeth has become. She never speaks to anyone, and it’s only through the exchange between these two minor characters that we know what’s going on. Along with the doctor, the audience observes, studies, and diagnoses her, like she’s a specimen for a scientist. Any strength or influence she had is gone. Furthermore, she’s **speaking in prose rather than blank verse**, so that her speech lacks sophistication and control.

Shakespeare used prose for characters who were lower class or insane. Hence, Lady Macbeth isn’t as impressive or intimidating as she once was.



Lady Macbeth’s speech is incoherent, frantic, and continuous, as her **internal monologue is said aloud**. She alternates between worrying about her growing guilt and telling an imagined Macbeth off for jeopardising their plot. For example, in one long string of monologue, she says, “**The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o'that, my lord, no more o'that. You mar all with this starting,**” going from panicking about their growing body-count to scolding Macbeth for being jumpy in an instant. The **random, disjointed structure** of her speech reflects how she’s torn between her ambition and her guilt. Part of her is holding onto the woman she was before, someone who was fearless and unsympathetic of Macbeth’s fear, while the rest of her is descending into remorse and grief. Therefore, there is a level of hypocrisy in her character. A case of **situational irony** is the way she worries about being unable to wash the blood from her hands: earlier, she thought a “**little water**” would clear her of guilt, but now she learns this isn’t true.

Lady Macbeth is hardly mentioned by the other characters for the rest of the play. Only upon her death does Macbeth think of her, highlighting how separate the two of them have become. She



drifted away from the outside world, caged inside the castle. Before the murder, Lady Macbeth could never have imagined fading into such insignificance.

Lady Macbeth is forgotten until the last scene of the play, where she is referred to not by name, but by the epithet “**fiend-like queen**”. On the one hand, this summarises who Lady Macbeth wanted to be at the start, suggesting she will be remembered for her villainy and cruelty. On the other, the use of “**queen**” presents her as Macbeth’s sidekick and wife, reducing her to the back bench as all women were in Jacobean society. She has no individual identity, and is known only by her relation to Macbeth. Little do they know that she was the one who put the whole plan into motion.

RELATIONSHIPS

Macbeth | Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are incredibly ambitious and power-hungry. Most of what we see of their marriage is their plotting and conspiring. Both are weakened by guilt and paranoia as the plot develops, and by the end have isolated themselves from each other. The main difference between them is their **confidence**: Lady Macbeth is determined, ruthless, strong-willed, and self-assured, whereas Macbeth is uncertain, weak-willed, and hesitant. The **power dynamic** between them switches. Initially, Lady Macbeth holds the power in their relationship, despite being in an inferior position according to society. She relies on Macbeth for power and status, but controls Macbeth like he’s her own puppet. Eventually, Macbeth breaks away from her, plotting without her and keeping secrets.



KEY QUOTES

“Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be / What thou art promised; yet do I fear thy nature, / It is too full o’th’milk of human kindness / To catch the nearest way.” (A1S5)

- Follow the same structure as the Witches’ prophecies, implying she has her own psychic abilities and associating her with the supernatural.
- Lady Macbeth “**fear[s]**” Macbeth’s kind nature; fear is typically associated with evil or the supernatural, but in this statement, Lady Macbeth reverses this thought. By fearing Macbeth’s kindness, she implies that **morality is a frightening, threatening thing**. Alternatively, “**fear**” reveals how desperately Lady Macbeth wants to become queen. The **noun “nature”** alludes to Macbeth’s mortal soul and shows that she is referring to Macbeth’s true identity, the parts of himself that he can’t change. Therefore, she is presenting Macbeth as a person whose moral compass and compassion are inherent or permanent.
 - Moreover, by calling it “**human kindness**”, she implies Macbeth’s personality is universally recognised to be kind. Shakespeare implies kindness is exclusive to “**human[s]**”, and is an objective thing, meaning it can’t be disputed or interpreted differently. Macbeth shares his goodness with the rest of the human race, but Lady Macbeth wants to rid herself of it, and take him with her.
- Lady Macbeth continues to portray Macbeth’s “**human kindness**” as an **unfavourable trait** for him to have. The phrase “**too full**” again suggests his nature will be an obstacle to her plans, and might also be interpreted as a sign of corruption.
 - In ancient medicine, people believed that your health depended on having a balance of four different fluids, or ‘humours’. By suggesting Macbeth is “**too full**” of “**milk**”, Lady Macbeth might be implying he is ill or mentally unbalanced. The **metaphor “milk of human kindness”** presents kindness as a fluid, changeable thing. Milk can expire, go rotten, or be poisoned, so Shakespeare may be hinting that though Lady Macbeth is worried about Macbeth at the moment, she believes she can corrupt him. Alternatively, “**milk**” connotes breastfeeding, and so associates “**human kindness**” with femininity. This presents **compassion as a weakness**, something that emasculates Macbeth and stops him from being the strong, brave king she wants him to be. The use of the “**milk**” **metaphor**, as well as applying a ‘feminine’ trait to Macbeth, **suggests gender is fluid**.



"Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear / And chastise with the valour of my tongue / All that impedes thee from the golden round." - Lady Macbeth, (A1S5)

- Lady Macbeth summons Macbeth with a “***hie thee hither***” in the same way that the Witches summoned their familiars (animal companions) in the opening scene. This suggests she views him as a means to an end, or a tool to help her get her way.
- The **imagery** of “***pour my spirits in thine ear***” evokes **demonic possession**, showing how Lady Macbeth wants to overpower Macbeth with her own villainy.
- This whole extract might seem sexual, and one interpretation is that sex is used in the subtext to illustrate the power dynamics Lady Macbeth is manipulating. Typically, to “***pour [your] spirits***” would be a masculine action, while the one receiving those “***spirits***” would be seen as the female. However, in this case, Lady Macbeth wants to take the **masculine role**, reflecting how she consistently strips Macbeth of his manliness. In keeping with the theme of gender that Lady Macbeth uses in her first soliloquies, she wants to **subvert** traditional gender roles as a way of getting what she wants.

"Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here / And fill me from the crown to the toe topfull / Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood, / Stop up th'access and passage to remorse / That no compunctionous visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between / Th'effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers." (A1S5)

- This is a pivotal moment in her character development. She is dedicating herself entirely to her conspiracy, even willing to sacrifice her own mind and body to whatever evil “***spirits***” will help her reach her goal. She views herself as a harbinger of death for Duncan, and so it’s fitting that what follows is, for all extents and purposes, a witch’s spell.
- The use of **anatomy**, such as “***the crown to the toe***” and “***breasts***”, makes her speech feel very invasive and uncomfortable, as well as illustrating how Lady Macbeth is trying to mutate into something else. Furthermore, the reference to “***blood***” and “***milk***” shows how her soul and mind will also be affected. Because of the theory of the four humours in medieval medicine, a person’s bodily fluids (such as Lady Macbeth’s “***blood***”) would have determined their true nature. By asking the spirits to tamper with her insides, Lady Macbeth is asking for a complete makeover. Alternatively, the



combination of “**blood**” and “**gall**” could be an allusion to Jesus’ crucifixion. Jesus’ side was pierced to prove he was dead, and blood came gushing out; before he died, the Roman soldiers offered him a wine laced with gall, or poison. Lady Macbeth is welcoming these substances, suggesting she is on the side of the Roman soldiers.

- The other key aspect of this quote is the **theme of gender**, summarised in Lady Macbeth’s use of the **verb “unsex”**. Though the attributes Lady Macbeth desires, including cruelty, are typically associated with masculinity, Lady Macbeth isn’t asking to be made into a man: she is asking to be rid of the parts that make her a woman. “**Unsex**” conveys androgyny and ambiguity. Lady Macbeth seems to associate goodness with humanity (“**human kindness**”), and Shakespeare implies that gender is a sign of humanity (“**single state of man**”). By being “**unsex[ed]**”, Lady Macbeth would escape the **gender binary** altogether, and so would be removed from humanity. This would free her from the burdens and weaknesses of morality and conscience.

“To beguile the time, / Look like the time, bear welcome in your eye, / Your hand, your tongue; look like th’innocent flower, / But be the serpent under’t.” (A1S5)

- This quote is an explicit nod to the **theme of appearance vs. reality**, as Lady Macbeth instructs her husband on how to fool everyone around them. Shakespeare shows how she intends to **exploit** the differences between appearance and reality, as well as exploit how gullible our senses are, to achieve her goal. Once again, Shakespeare uses **anatomical imagery**, such as “**eye**”, “**hand**”, and “**tongue**”, as well as a **semantic field of sight**, “**look**” and “**eye**”, in Lady Macbeth’s descriptions of emotion. She tells Macbeth to make sure that any “**welcome**” or kindness he shows others is purely surface level. This suggests that their **public personas** are **superficial** and hollow, with no genuine meaning behind them. The body parts she lists implies that emotion can be replicated and imitated, as if it is a physical product rather than an abstract feeling. The **theme of sight** conveys how our senses can be tricked: we are taken in by appearances and performances.
- The **parallel structure** in “**to beguile the time, / Look like the time**” emphasises the idea of **mirroring**. Lady Macbeth tells Macbeth that the best way to trick people is by reflecting back at them what they want to see. Again, their identities are surface level, with no substance behind the reflective glass. The **verb “beguile”** conveys **menace** and **manipulation**. Also, it connotes



enchantment and witchcraft, continuing to present Lady Macbeth as an enchantress.

“Nought’s had, all’s spent / Where our desire is got without content. ‘Tis safer to be that which we destroy / Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.” (A3S2)

- Something significant about this quote is that Lady Macbeth says it when she's alone on stage. This implies we can trust it more than other things she says, because she isn't performing for an audience: as far as we can tell, she is being her genuine self. We see that she is admitting she is worried, something she would never want to confess to her husband. Both of the Macbeths are suffering from the same case of paranoia, but neither will confide in the other. The **parallel phrases** “**nought’s had, all’s spent**” shows how Lady Macbeth’s thinking is black-and-white. She goes from one extreme to the other: from “**nought**” to “**all**”. Shakespeare implies that she sees no value in what they did unless they succeed fully - in other words, unless they never face consequences, and can enjoy life to the fullest. This portrays her as a selfish, unsatisfied character, and implies that currently, Duncan died for nothing. Shakespeare hints that the Macbeths will never be satisfied, and so will always have “**nought**”. Fulfilling your “**desire**” isn’t enough, because you need to be “**content**”, too. The list keeps growing.
- We can also detect fear in Lady Macbeth’s character. The use of the **comparative adjective** “**safer**” suggests Lady Macbeth is aware of their dangerous position, and wishes she could feel more at ease. Shakespeare suggests to his audience that this is a just punishment for her actions. The phrase “**dwell in doubtful joy**” is full of uncertainty and hesitancy, reflecting the unstable environment of the play. Shakespeare shows how nothing can be guaranteed, and this eats away at a person. The consonance of “d” could mimic the chattering of teeth or stuttering, reflecting how Lady Macbeth is struggling to adapt to her new life.



The Witches

SYMBOLISES PURE EVIL & DARKNESS

INTRODUCTION

The Witches are commonly referred to as the “**weird sisters**” or the “**Wayward sisters**”, depending on the version of the text that you read (due to discrepancies between Shakespearean English and the modern form). Shakespeare portrays these Witches as **supernatural beings**, who give Macbeth many **cryptic prophecies**; they predict that he will become “**Thane of Cawdor**”, then that he will “**get kings**” and finally that he shall not be “**vanquished**” until “**Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him.**”



Shakespeare introduces the Witches in the first scene of the play, thus giving special emphasis to their importance. Shakespeare’s use of **parallelism** in the **paradoxical** phrase “**Fair is foul, and foul is fair**” foreshadows the rest of the play.

Shakespeare refers to the Witches as the **Weird Sisters** (depending on the version that you read), which bears connotations of “**wired**” meaning fate in Old English and therefore associating their speech with **prophecy**. The witches could represent the **three fates** from **classical mythology**, as the three fates represent the past, present and future. This reflects the three predictions they give to Macbeth, as they claim to “**spin the threads of life**”. The three Witches have differing roles as one spins, one measures, one cuts. This relates to their roles in the future, present and past, respectively. Shakespeare suggests they are in control of events, as they decide on the **fates and destinies of men** - or perhaps they lead them to their fate.

SYMBOLISM

- **Supernatural:** The inclusion of ‘magical’ creatures is contextually significant as the **contemporary audience** was interested in, believed in and was fearful of witches. The monarch at the time of writing in the early 17th Century was James I, who wrote the book ‘**Daemonologie**’ which explained how to identify a witch and how to torture them. These witches would be seen as a very real and genuine threat to the **contemporary audience**, who actually believed that witches lived amongst them and are more than a **fictional fantasy**.



CHARACTER IN CONTEXT

Appealing to James I

Shakespeare uses the character of the Witches in order to appeal to the current monarch James I, who had a passion for the **history of witchcraft**. It is important to understand how Shakespeare portrays the Witches in an appealing fashion.

James I's passion for witches is evident as he was involved in many witch trials (e.g. North Berwick Witch Trials), where he took part in interrogating a witch. He also believed they had tried to kill him on the way to the trials and therefore the portrayal of the Witches as **inherently evil and agents of Satan** appeals to James I. He wrote a book about witches – '**Daemonologie**'. Through connecting witches to regicide Shakespeare is clearly demonstrating that witchcraft is **infernal** and thus Shakespeare is evidencing his allegiance to the king and gaining his favour through this play.

Shakespeare also has the motive of wanting to make the play interesting to James so that he will **financially support the theatre** and **ensure patronage** (ascending from the Lord Chamberlain's men to The King's Men, under James I).

Shakespeare had been very reliant on Elizabeth's patronage previously in protection from puritans trying to ban the theatre. Perhaps this could be why there are so many **religious references**. In order to prove that theatre is not sinful and can actually serve to accompany the messages of the bible and even reinforce them. This is shown through Macbeth's fall from grace as he succumbs to the **temptation** of the Witches.



Regicide

Shakespeare **condemns regicide** through his portrayal of Macbeth and the mental torment it causes him. You can consider why Shakespeare wanted to exhibit the evil nature of regicide in the contemporary context. Through presenting regicide as inspired or even controlled by the Witches, Shakespeare implies it is related to the **devil** and hence regicide will have severe **religious consequences**. This act is directly **contradicting the will of God** as the divine right of kings is subverted through regicide.

Furthermore, Macbeth is aligned with forces of **supernatural** evil within the play. He is evidence that association with the **supernatural** will always result in suffering and severe consequences. This is also evident through Shakespeare's portrayal of Lady Macbeth, who is driven insane.



The Witches' direct influence upon the Macbeths is evidenced through the link between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's lack of sleep and also the Witches' proclamation that "**sleep shall neither night nor day, hang upon his penthouse lid**". This could be the Witches **preventing sleep**, as this lack of sleep will cause Macbeth to waste away and deteriorate as a result of this curse.

Bible

The **Bible** forms a great deal of references made in Macbeth, as the Witches **subvert the holiness** of Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism were the mainstream contemporary religions). It is important to consider why Shakespeare portrays the Witches as **symbolising** the perceived evil within the Bible.

The audience perceives the Witches as **agents of the devil**, as stated in King James I's '**'Daemonologie'**', which theorised that the witches carried out the work of the devil and were

controlled by him. Therefore they are the devil's influence on earth, carrying out the work that is beyond his capability. Hence, regicide is the work of the devil.



They act as part of the fall of man, in causing him to succumb to temptation – like the serpent in the **Garden of Eden**. The Witches form an **anti-trinity** - as they always appear in a three they form a **trinity of evil**. This opposes and contradicts the **trinity of the Father, the Sun and the Holy Ghost**, who according to the Bible, comprise "**one God in three Divine persons**".

Thus it could be contended that the three Witches **comprise the Devil in three infernal persons**. Macbeth turns to them in times of need (when worried after Banquo's death) for advice and comfort instead of to God. He has transitioned from good to evil – from "**fair to foul**".

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

Supernatural

The structure of the Witches' speech emphasises their supernatural characteristics. The **rhythmic** and **chant-like** nature of the Witches' rhetoric implies that their words have real extraordinary power. Shakespeare, through **linguistic techniques**, uses this as **symbolic** of the **supernatural** and to connect other characters to the **supernatural**. This is evident as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth also speak in **rhyming couplets** at times when they are expressing evil or when they are controlled by the **supernatural**. For example, Macbeth says: "**stars hide**



"your fires // let not light see my black and deep desires" and "*fairest show // false face must hide what false heart doth know*".

Trochaic Tetrameter

Shakespeare uses **trochaic tetrameter** when the Witches' speak. The audience will notice this shift in meter between the characters and place importance on what is being said. This causes the witches to stand out as different and other-worldly, as this is a difficult and unnatural way to speak, causing them to be perceived as **supernatural** and **dangerous**.

→ This **meter** is also used for the fairies in 'A Midsummer's Night Dream'.

Rhyming Couplets

Shakespeare's use of **rhyming couplets** gives the Witches' speech a spell-like sound as is **symbolic** of spell casting and bringing things into existence through their utterances. This sets up the debate as to whether the Witches are really controlling events or if they are in actuality leading Macbeth into his own demise.

KEY MOMENTS

SC	OCCURRENCE	SIGNIFICANCE
1.1	The Witches are introduced.	By opening the entire play with a scene revolving around the Witches, in " thunder and lightning " (pathetic fallacy), Shakespeare is being explicit in setting one of the major themes of the play as the supernatural. This also works to intrigue the reader - and suggests that the tension in the play will be caused by the presence of the Witches.
1.3	The Witches meet with Macbeth (and Banquo).	This scene and the Witches' inclusion in it reaffirms the audience that a key theme of the play is the Supernatural. They state their predictions for Macbeth: " hail to thee, thane of Glamis [...] hail to thee, thane of Cawdor [...] hail Macbeth, thou shalt be king hereafter. " By the end of the scene, Ross has joined the characters and pronounces Macbeth thane of Cawdor, which solidifies Macbeth's belief in their prophecies. They also predict for Banquo: " Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none " suggesting his descendants will be Kings, even if Banquo himself will not become one.
3.5	The Witches meet with Hecate.	It's argued that this scene has not been written by Shakespeare, and is not crucial to understanding the



		play. However, here Hecate (Goddess of Witchcraft) meets with the Witches to explain that she wishes to play a direct role in Macbeth's downfall. This leads to the question, is Macbeth entirely responsible for his downfall?
4.1	The second meeting with Macbeth and the introduction of apparitions.	The Witches make further predictions, through the forms of apparitions which appear before Macbeth: " beware Macduff ", " none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth " and " Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until / Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill / Shall come against him ". This scene demonstrates the immense power that the Witches and their prophecies hold over Macbeth.

RELATIONSHIPS

Macbeth | The Witches are dependent on Macbeth to fulfill their **prophecies**. It was believed that witches were unable to directly kill man so instead they had to control others to create the disorder and chaos they wished to impart on mankind.

- The Witches refer to a story about a sailor. The **rhyming couplet** "*Though his bark cannot be lost, / Yet it shall be tempest-tossed*," shows the audience the limited power they have over man. They cannot directly destroy his ship, but instead they can cause a storm to occur.

The Witches can't kill Duncan themselves but instead they have the power to influence the men around him. It could therefore be argued that Macbeth becomes their puppet and vehicle for evil. Their **prophecies** cause Macbeth to realise his own **entrenched** ambitions and then inspire him to act upon it. It is their suggestion and temptation that triggers his fall.

- Perhaps Macbeth is a **greater force of evil** than the Witches as he is the one who physically carries out the act of regicide. Indeed, they recognise "*something wicked this way comes*".



However, you could argue that the Witches are simply a **catalyst** for Macbeth's actions, it is his desire to fulfill his ambition for power which provides the momentum within the play. Perhaps, Macbeth had the potential to sin, but needed the suggestion in order to persuade him into acting. Therefore it can be said that Macbeth had the intent all along, but needed the Witches to enlighten him of it. The Witches sparked confidence within him so that he could do it and succeed.

The notion of **regicide** already existed within Macbeth's mind and he sustains it himself, rather than the Witches planting this entirely new concept in Macbeth's head. Therefore, Shakespeare's play is more of an exploration of the **psychological state** of Macbeth, rather than an exploration of the **supernatural**. This prompts the interpretation that the Witches only predicted events rather than causing them and deciding fate. Duncan had already decided that Macbeth would be Thane of Cawdor, before they told Macbeth

Duncan | Though they never meet, King Duncan **linguistically echoes** the witches in speech (unwittingly) as he exclaims "**when the battle's lost and won**", which is Shakespeare using **parallelism** (repeated grammatical structure) to echo the Witches, who state "**what he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won**". This shows how the witches exert control over all aspects of the world – even the king.

Furthermore, this **alleviates responsibility** from Macbeth as suspicions of King Duncan's divineness is not necessarily only due to innate evil that the Witches have encouraged within him. Duncan is presented as the **pinnacle of virtue** as he is "**so clear in his great office**", yet he is still susceptible to the witches control as shown by this use of **parallelism**.

Banquo | Banquo is also affected by the Witches, as he admits to dreaming of the witches: "**I dreamed last night of the three weird sisters**". However, this occurs on the same day that Banquo met the Witches, prompting the question - had he been thinking of them before they met? Were Macbeth and Banquo already connected to the **supernatural**?

This dream shows that they have influenced Banquo too, however he serves as evidence that the witches can be resisted and they do not have complete control as they give him a **prophecy** too, which he ignores. This response from Banquo is necessary for his character as he serves as the **foil** to Macbeth and to embrace the Witches would go against the purpose of his character.

Lady Macbeth | Lady Macbeth can be interpreted as a fourth witch, of perhaps an even greater evil. It is important to understand why Shakespeare portrays Lady Macbeth as similar to the Witches. She lapses into **rhyming couplets** when trying to persuade Macbeth to commit **regicide** and evil deeds. This **linguistic mimic** of the Witches' form of speech connects her to their inherent evil. Lady Macbeth uses **paradoxical rhyming couplets** which bear connotations of both evil and the Witches, including: "**only look up clear; to alter favour ever is to fear**", "**alls spent**" "**without content**", and "**that which we destroy**" "**doubtful joy**"



Lady Macbeth defies **gender roles** as she is **dominant** in her relationship with Macbeth, which was often all the justification needed to convict a woman of witchcraft. She becomes the **proxy** of the witches to maintain their **evil influence** over Macbeth.

- This is shown as she greets him in the same way as the witches did which implies a form of connection:
 - ◆ Lady Macbeth - "**Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor, greater than both by the all hail hereafter**".
 - ◆ The Witches "**hail Macbeth thane of Glamis/Cawdor/thou shalt be king hereafter**"

Lady Macbeth's ongoing influence on Macbeth could be why, unlike Banquo, he is unable to resist the Witches' influence. Macbeth has many moments when he is decided to resist evil and not murder Duncan. But this reluctance causes him to be **emasculated** by Lady Macbeth - she is outraged, calls him a coward and questions his manhood: "**When you durst do it,**" she says, "**then you were a man**". This tempts Macbeth back into murder as he does not want to be seen as **feminine**.

KEY QUOTES

"your face my thane is like a book".

- The Witches capitalise on the obvious intentions and ambitions of Macbeth, as demonstrated through this **simile**. The Witches can be argued to simply be a **catalyst** to Macbeth's inevitable fulfillment of his ambition for power: his demise.

The Witches are described as: "imperfect speakers"

- However, Macbeth listens to them and their prophecies anyway because he wants what they say to be true.
 - They speak in **riddles** that are meant to be misunderstood and Macbeth chooses to ignore this as his **greed for power overcomes him**.
 - Therefore, it could be argued that they are not controlling fate, rather they are allowing Macbeth to gain validation of the desires he already has.
- Their words are **vague and ambiguous** because they are not a source of control but a source of temptation.



- Macbeth interprets their speech to suit his pre-existing desires and therefore it could be argued that Macbeth twists their **prophecies** in order to further **his own agenda of power**.

"lost and won" & "lesser than Macbeth and greater".

- Shakespeare establishes the Witches as a source of **chaos and disorder**.
 - This is evident as their interference causes the **reversal of order**.
 - Things that shouldn't be able to coexist begin to occur as the **complex riddles** of the Witches come to fruition.
- **Paradoxical** phrases are often used by Shakespeare, when the Witches are speaking to demonstrate the ostensibly (seemingly true but not necessarily true) nature of their positive prophecies made to Macbeth.

"valour of my tongue".

- Their use of language to tempt and control bears connotations of **satanic imagery** and the snake in the **Garden of Eden**.
 - They are female and so this is the only way women can have power
 - The serpent used untrustworthy language to tempt Eve, in the Garden of Eden, through twisting what God had said and claiming he didn't want them to become like him; the fruit wasn't really forbidden.

"fair and foul"

- The oxymoronic language used by Shakespeare **reflects Macbeth's confusion in the audience**, who would be similarly ambivalent towards the actual meaning of the **prophecies**, as they too cannot understand the **oxymorons**.
 - This works to cultivate intrigue and build **tension**.
- Things that are accepted as foul seem fair to Macbeth, like **regicide** (killing the King).
- Macbeth who was fair becomes foul, himself.

"look not like the inhabitants of the earth, / And yet are on it"

- This **juxtaposing** comment further works to reassure the confusing and illogical nature of the Witches, and the theme of the Supernatural in general. This suggests



their introduction to the characters, especially Banquo and Macbeth, will be chaotic.

- Links to Banquo's later comment: "***you should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so.***" - The Witches clearly work beyond the natural laws of physics and biology.



LORD BANQUO

REPRESENTS MACBETH'S ANTITHESIS

INTRODUCTION

Banquo is a brave noble. At the beginning of the play we learn from the **Witches' prophecy** that his children will inherit the Scotish throne.

Banquo is similar to Macbeth in that they both have **ambitious** thoughts, however Banquo demonstrates restraint as he doesn't act upon these **desires**. The character of Banquo is the opposite to Macbeth, as he represents the route that Macbeth chose not to take. The path where ambition doesn't lead to betrayal and murder. Thus it is **Banquo's ghost**, rather than Duncan's, that haunts Macbeth.



SYMBOLISM

Shakespeare uses the **constructs of Macbeth and Banquo** to show how men can react when shown temptation. Banquo is portrayed as Macbeth's **foil** and is therefore **symbolic** of man's ability to **resist temptation**.

The Witches' prophecies

We can see the differences between the two men when we observe their reactions to the witches' prophecies. Macbeth is "**rapt withal**" which bears connotations of being **entranced and absorbed** by the Witches. However, Banquo will "**neither beg nor fear your favours nor your hate**" as he is **indifferent to their prophecies**. He takes the witches for what they physically appear to be - ragged old women. He doesn't trust them so he perceives their **prophecies with scepticism**.



Banquo's role as **foil** emphasised by the **juxtaposition** of his **prophecies** with Macbeth's "**lesser**" and "**greater**", with "**happier**" and "**not so happy**". Here, Shakespeare's use of **antithesis** in his phrasing hints that Banquo serves as



Macbeth's **antithesis**. This suggests Banquo is a **morally strong** and **virtuous** character who **resists evil**, providing a contrast to Macbeth, who is a morally weak, **innately flawed** and **evil character** who gives into temptation.

Temptation

Shakespeare's exposure of both Banquo and Macbeth to temptation is necessary for the audience to view the contrasting responses to temptation. This allows them to decide which man is the **morally righteous** one.

Shakespeare portrays **temptation** as the **crux** of the play. It is vital for Banquo to be faced with temptation and ambition as it proves that Banquo is **morally strong**; his strength doesn't come from an easy path, but from **resisting temptation**. Macbeth's **hamartia** (a fatal flaw) is that he is **too weak to resist the influence** of the Witches and Lady Macbeth.

Arguably this is a message from Shakespeare to the audience that everyone is capable of evil and they must resist it. Banquo doesn't speak out against **injustice and corruption**, despite being tempted by the promise of being "**the root and father of many kings**". He won't reveal the **evil prophecy** that promises him attractive things; perhaps this is because he wants it to come true too and has the **flaw of ambition**. However, his flaw is not his **hamartia**; he can resist it.

EXAM TIP!

Using terminology, which you may be unfamiliar with can be scary at first but once you get the hang of it, this can greatly benefit AO2 for subject terminology.

CHARACTER IN CONTEXT

- **Response to the Supernatural:** Banquo resists the temptations of evil offered by the Supernatural (in the form of the Witches) throughout the play. This would have **appeased** a contemporary audience, which widely believed that the devil existed on earth and walked amongst humans trying to tempt them. Thus, the Witches can be seen as a **symbol of temptation to sin** that Banquo, as a **moral superior**, is able to resist.
 - When Banquo finds that the **prophecy** is coming true he responds with "**what, can the devil speak true**". This implies that he views them as **agents of the devil** and sees them for what they are. This supports James I's view in **Daemonologie** that witches are controlled by the devil.
- **Church:** Banquo would have been perceived by a contemporary audience as a **moralistic character** as his values were in line with those of the Christian Church. He



calls upon God for **help in resisting temptation**: "*merciful powers, restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature gives way to in repose*". Shakespeare uses the theme of **temptation**, which has **Biblical connotations**, in reference to Banquo.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Noble:** Shakespeare demonstrates the **noble qualities** and Banquo's "*royalty of nature*" as he is literally **royal in nature** - it was prophesied that "*thou shalt get kings*". Also, royal in terms of virtue – he is **honourable and virtuous**. Thus he will disapprove of the murder, fight for justice and remain loyal to the king (Duncan) - as warned by "*keep my bosom franchised*".
- **Strategic:** The honour of Banquo is debatable as it could be argued that his response to the Witches' **prophecy is actually strategic**. It is important to consider why Shakespeare allows for this debate to be had, through his **ambivalent portrayal of Banquo**. Banquo is repeatedly referred to as being **noble and honourable**, throughout the play: "*noble Banquo*", "*worthy Banquo*", "*no less deserv'd*", "*wisdom that doth guide his valour*" and a "*royalty of nature*". Banquo states that he must "*keep my allegiance clear*" – is this **allegiance** to the past king (Duncan) which would make him a threat to Macbeth, or **allegiance** to any king (which could make him an ally). He speaks in terms of business: "**my allegiance**" – loyalty and commitment – "**my**" – almost like he's selling it and "**augment**" – make something greater / increase. This gives the sense of him playing **strategically** – carefully chosen and **non-committal language**. Allowing him to reserve his judgement so he can choose to support whichever side will best benefit him.
- **Resistive to evil:** Banquo's response to evil separates him from Macbeth. They are exposed to the same influences – witches and promises of greatness - however, Banquo turns to God, asking for help in resisting evil and ultimately doesn't act on his ambitions as he recognises they are a force of evil.
 - This is evident as he is suspicious from the start, as he questions "**are you aught that man may question?**". Here, he is recognising the Witches **supernatural** and therefore untrustworthy.
 - When he finds that the **prophecy** is coming true he responds with "**what, can the devil speak true**" and this implies that he views them as **agents of the devil** – sees them for what they are; Banquo knows that the witches are a **route of temptation** to sin so he is able to resist them.



- **Aligned with Jesus:** Banquo could be used by Shakespeare to give a **moral message** to the audience about rejecting evil thoughts and the importance of turning to God in times of temptation. Banquo isn't perfect, and is tempted on some level by the Witches' prophecy, however his ability to reject evil is what makes him a moral character.
 - He is **less able to resist ambition** when he sleeps, shown by the comment: "*I dream'd of the three weird sisters last night*" (showing he subconsciously thinks about the Witches' prophecy). But instead of trying to hide this, he confesses to God and asks for help in remaining moral and virtuous. This has **Biblical connotations** as Jesus was **tempted three times** by the devil and resisted; perhaps Shakespeare is attempting to draw parallels between the Banquo and Jesus.

EXAM TIP!

When analysing language techniques, ensure you refer to "Shakespeare" explicitly. This shows the examiner that you are considering his methods directly.



KEY MOMENTS

CH	OCCURRENCE	SIGNIFICANCE
1.3	Banquo meets the Witches	<p>Here, Banquo and Macbeth meet the three Witches and are told the prophecy. For Banquo, whilst they say he won't be King, they say his descendants will be. As Macbeth has just been told that he will be King, this sets up a tension between Banquo and Macbeth despite their long standing friendship. Banquo's reaction to the Witches is one of suspicion, whilst Macbeth immediately believes the prophecies.</p>
3.1	Macbeth plots Banquo's murder	<p>Death at the peripeteia (sudden reversal of fortune) Shakespeare has an ulterior motive to portray Banquo's death as a noble one. It is important to understand why Shakespeare deliberately decides for Banquo to be killed by Macbeth's assassins and die while saving his child. This death would have been more compelling to James I than the death of Duncan, due to James' personal connection and interest in Banquo and will, therefore, care about his death at the hands of Macbeth.</p> <p>This plotline is significant as Shakespeare made a change from the original version of Macbeth: His original source material of Macbeth (called the Holinshed Chronicles) has been changed by Shakespeare for this very reason. Originally, Banquo was portrayed as the co-conspirator of Macbeth and was involved in the murder. Shakespeare changed this story line to flatter Banquo and thus James I, who believed he was the descendant of Banquo. By presenting Banquo favorably, Shakespeare is showing support and praise for James. He needed to make the play enjoyable to the king and thereby win him as a patron – support his play company and win his political support against Puritans trying to ban theatre.</p> <p>Shakespeare also needed to demonstrate his belief in James' claim to the throne and the 'Divine Right of Kings', and show he is not a threat to James' post-gunpowder plot. He was initially connected to the plotters – William Catesby (father of main plotter Robert Catesby) close friends with Shakespeare's father and people had been executed for lesser connections. Actors / playwrights were naturally suspected of crimes – moved around a lot and no fixed home or workplace – so were not accountable for.</p> <p>Banquo serves as a dramatic device – to act as Macbeth's foil and highlight his moral weakness through juxtaposition – but also as a</p>



		political device to simultaneously entertain the king and demonstrate Shakespeare's loyalty and support.
3.3	Banquo is murdered	<p>Banquo's death marks the breakdown in Macbeth's marriage, and Lady Macbeth's mental deterioration increases. They start to distance from one another after this point as Lady Macbeth disapproves of Banquo's murder "you must leave this" and thus Macbeth stops involving her in his plans.</p> <p>Macbeth starts acting independently of his wife, as she is no longer necessary and is redundant. Lady Macbeth has lost her reason to be evil and powerful – she can't support her husband. She gives in to her guilt as her conscience starts to take over and she goes insane.</p> <p>Macbeth and Lady Macbeth develop in reverse directions. Macbeth becomes more like how Lady Macbeth was formerly, while Lady Macbeth becomes more like Macbeth was. This is therefore a reversal of gender roles and the point at which Macbeth cannot return to virtue, which is evidenced through the extended metaphor: "<i>I am in blood stepp'd in so far that should I wade no further, returning were as tedious as to go o'er</i>" - here the metaphor of wading through "blood" is symbolic of guilt. Macbeth was a reluctant killer, tempted by Lady Macbeth and the witches. He felt regret and recognised the injustice of Duncan's death - "<i>wake Duncan with thy knocking, I would thou couldst</i>". Before, he was killing only to speed up the prophecy. However, now he is killing despite it. He is attempting to change it. Shakespeare does this to portray his greed – what he has will never be enough, he will never feel secure. Thus he will keep doing evil because "<i>things bad begun make strong themselves by ill</i>".</p>
3.4	Banquo's ghost	After being killed by Macbeth in the scene before, Banquo reappears as a ghost at a Banquet held by Macbeth and his wife; however, he is only visible to Macbeth. This, along with the floating dagger, enables Macbeth's paranoid mind even more. Banquo's ghost appears and disappears three times, increasing the chaotic state of Macbeth's thinking.



RELATIONSHIPS

Macbeth | Initially, Macbeth and Banquo are portrayed as having a very strong and loyal friendship due to their many years serving beside each other in battle. However, this relationship is tested when the two characters meet the Witches. From then on, Banquo is skeptical of their prophecies whereas Macbeth is not, causing a **division** and setting up Banquo as Macbeth's **foil** for the rest of the play. Banquo has always been overshadowed by Macbeth's victories. In Act Three, murderers were instructed by Macbeth to kill Banquo, and Banquo's ghost then appears to haunt Macbeth.

EXAM TIP!

You will develop your AO2 for characterisation, if you are able to include a direct comparison between the characters of Macbeth and Banquo.

The Witches | Banquo is suspicious of the Witches and their prophecies from when he and Macbeth first meet them in Act One Scene Three. They **create friction** between Banquo and Macbeth by telling them that whilst Macbeth will become King, Banquo's children will also become kings which in turn makes Macbeth suspicious of Banquo.

Fleance | (Banquo's son) Banquo appears to have a very protective and affectionate attitude towards his son, instructing him to "**fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly**" (A3S3) when it is apparent he is under attack from Macbeth (who thinks Fleance will become king eventually, due to the Witches' prophecies, and therefore is a threat). He manages to escape, but comes back at the end of the play to avenge his father and take the throne of Scotland, with the help of MacDuff.



KEY QUOTES

Shakespeare uses **metaphorical language** and **supernatural imagery** as Banquo proclaims "**the earth hath bubbles**" and questions "**have we eaten on the insane root?**".

- This quote demonstrates how Banquo works to distance himself from the witches whilst Macbeth aligns himself with them.
 - The **contemporary audience** would recognise the witches as a **force of evil** and thus favour Banquo.
 - While a modern audience would perhaps view the Witches as **humorous**, due to the lack of a belief in witches' existence.

"Our fears in Banquo / Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature / Reigns that which would be feared."

- Macbeth is shown to fear Banquo's "**royalty of nature**"
 - Banquo has had the same experience as Macbeth, yet Banquo has responded as Macbeth should have. This means Banquo serves as a constant reflection of how Macbeth should have acted. He also serves as a **constant reminder** of the **morality** Macbeth started with and is losing.

The two character's **contrasting responses** to the prophecies could be explained as Macbeth's name was first mentioned by the Witches, who were "**there to meet with Macbeth**".

- Therefore Macbeth knows he is the focus of their intent and thus allows them to **control him** as he is aligned and connected to the Witches. whereas Banquo could be less susceptible as the prophecies are not directly aimed at him, even though they concern his children.

Banquo asks the witches to "**speak then to me**" as he wants to know what the "**seeds of time**" have in store for him.

- This demonstrates that though Banquo is interested by the **prophecy** and does show his own ambition, the ambition he possesses is not as strong as Macbeth's (or he tries to disguise it).



- In this situation, he remains **composed and in control** as he states "**neither beg nor fear your favours nor your hate**".
 - This reveals that Banquo is a very moralistic and responsible character who is not easily led astray.
 - This **juxtaposes** Macbeth's response, who commands the Witches to "**stay, you imperfect speakers**", revealing his **desperation**.

Both Macbeth, who describes the witches as "**imperfect**", and Banquo have recognised the witches as unnatural and evil, yet Macbeth chooses to ignore this because he wants to believe their prophecies.

- However, the Witches' prophecy **prompts the question**: why does Banquo save his son? He tells Fleance to "**fly**" – but also "**thou mayst avenge**". Therefore, it is clear that he wants Fleance to avenge his death and perhaps kill Macbeth or to take the **crown and therefore fulfill the prophecy**.
- Earlier in the play, the father-son relationship is not depicted as being close or loving, as Shakespeare employs the **formal language** of "**boy**" and "**sir**", rather than 'father' or 'son'. Here, he makes the audience question whether his sacrifice is out of love, or out of ambition.

"I dream'd last night of the three weird sisters"

- This suggests that Banquo had been thinking of the witches before they met, as when he admits this is still the same night as they met the witches.
 - This point could just be an oversight on behalf of Shakespeare – which wouldn't be the first (for example, the thane of Cawdor had been killed...then executed?!?).
 - Or, arguably, it could be evidence that Banquo is **not entirely unconnected** to the **supernatural** either, like Macbeth supposedly is.

Banquo suspects Macbeth but doesn't speak out as he states "**I fear thou played'st most foully for't**".

- He suspects Macbeth because he can **identify evil as a moral person**.
- Or, perhaps, he suspects Macbeth because it's what Banquo would have done in Macbeth's position, as he had "**cursed thoughts**" himself.



"**noble Banquo**", "**worthy Banquo**", "**no less deserv'd**", "**wisdom that doth guide his valour**" and a "**royalty of nature**".

- Banquo is repeatedly referred to as being **noble and honourable** throughout the play.
- Shakespeare thus makes it clear that he is widely regarded as such and there should be no doubt to his loyalty. Yet, in Shakespeare's play 'Othello' the antagonist **Iago** is similarly known to be **honest and honourable** - yet is anything but these qualities.

The Witches predict Banquo being "**lesser than Macbeth and greater**".

- This becomes true: In status, he is lesser (sir) but he is **morally superior**, with a stronger will. He remained loyal to the king and **obedient** to God and the 'Great Chain of Being' and therefore he will have a **greater afterlife**.

Banquo frequently speaks in terms of business:

- "**my allegiance**" – loyalty and commitment – "**my**" – almost like he's selling it.
- "**augment**" – make something greater / increase.
- "**franchised**" – a **privilege or authorisation** granted by a governing power.

This gives the sense of him playing **strategically** – carefully chosen and **non-committal language**. Allowing him to reserve his judgement so he can choose to support whichever side will best benefit him.

"**the instruments of darkness tell us truths; win us with honest trifles to betray's in deepest consequence**".

- Here, Banquo is referring to the Witches as being "**the instruments of darkness**". Unlike Macbeth, who is refusing to see the potential consequences of believing in the prophecies, Banquo is aware that there is likely a trap involved in the predictions.

Whereas Macbeth asks Banquo to "**cleave to my consent**", Banquo vows to "**keep my allegiance clear**".

- This demonstrates he will not go against the king even if it benefits him.



"I shall be counselled"

- He is willing to be advised and tempted by Macbeth, which shows he's **franchised**
– wants to retain the privileges he has gained from loyalty to the king and this may change to new king.
 - States that "**my duties**" are "**forever knit**" to Macbeth
 - He has shifted his **loyalties and allegiance** to Macbeth rapidly.
- Therefore, it is clear that his **loyalty is not fixed** – to any king, but rather, he is loyal only to serve himself.

The **contemporary** audience widely believed that the devil existed on earth and walked amongst humans trying to tempt them. Thus, the witches can be seen as a **symbol of temptation** to sin that Banquo, as a **moral superior**, is able to resist. Macbeth being crowned as the **Thane of Cawdor** gives credibility to the Witches' prophecy and makes it seem like they will come true.

- Macbeth responds with **additional ambition**: "**yield to that suggestion**", while Banquo recognises it is a trick as he states "**the instruments of darkness tell us truths; win us with honest trifles to betray's in deepest consequence**".
 - Banquo recognises that this is temptation, and giving into it will have severe (religious) consequences.
- **His suspicion doesn't protect him from death**, but it protects him from moral and religious disgrace.
 - Will still **die in God's favour** as he resisted sin.



Macduff

SYMBOLISES ULTIMATE LOYALTY

INTRODUCTION

Macduff is, essentially, a minor character. However, he is, arguably, the **most prominent minor character** in the play. Macduff is a **static character**, in that his **loyalty** to King Duncan, and righteous heirs to the throne, is **unwavering**. He immediately distrusts Macbeth and refuses to attend his coronation. Ultimately, Macduff becomes a **focal point** for Macbeth's **rage and desire** to protect his throne. Macduff's family is murdered by Macbeth's assassins, after Macduff flees to England to seek help from the king. **Revenge** drives Macbeth to eventually kill Macduff and instill Malcolm, the **rightful heir** to the throne.

SYMBOLISM

Macduff is, in every way, the **opposite to the character of Macbeth** and therefore they are the **foil** of each other. It is important to consider why Shakespeare portrays Macduff as in stark contrast to that of the character of Macbeth. These two characters extend to the **symbols** of the fight between good and evil. Arguably, these characters may also have a Biblical **symbolism** – a representation of **sin being defeated and order restored**.

- Defeating Macbeth is Macbeth's destiny, as Macduff suspected him from the start and the Witches **prophesied** that a "**man of woman born**" would defeat him.
- He has the **opposite definition** of manhood to Macbeth, as Macduff doesn't resist emotion but embraces it.
- His bravery is selfless and out of a love for his country; violence is for a justified cause (not murder) and it is only proportional to what is needed. He is confident in facing Macbeth, as he calls to him "**turn hell hound, turn**", demonstrating that he is not afraid to fight Macbeth, as Macduff has **righteousness** on his side. His true bravery exposes **Macbeth's cowardice**.
- Macbeth's confidence and bravery comes from **hubris** (excessive pride), due to the witches' prophecies that state only a "**man of woman born**" could defeat him. Thus, it is clear that Macbeth has been a **coward** since Act 1: he killed Duncan in his sleep, he killed Banquo with murderers. Macduff's bravery is pure and honourable and therefore succeeds in killing Macbeth in battle.



EXAM TIP!

Using terminology, which you may be unfamiliar with can be scary at first but once you get the hang of it, this can greatly benefit AO2 for subject terminology.

CHARACTER IN CONTEXT

Religious Context

Macduff's reaction to Duncan's death is a **long hyperbolic speech**, where he uses **religious language** to show his belief in the '**Divine Right of Kings**'. This shows Macduff to be adhering to the religious, moralistic thoughts of the historical period.

Macduff uses **metaphorical language** to describe Duncan's death: "**most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope the lord's anointed temple**". His body is referred to as a "**temple**" in order to reinforce the holiness of Duncan's reign. He recognises Duncan as the true, **divinely ordained**, king; the "**Lord's temple**" and thus God's earthly deputy. Kings are anointed with **holy oil** at their coronation to signify this.

- Hence the murder is not just a crime (murder), it is an unforgivable sin against God, which is "**sacrilegious**" and **unholy - tantamount** (equivalent) to the murder of God himself.

In the Jacobean era it was believed that God picked who was to be king, therefore to try and change who was king was a sin as you were going directly against God's will. This is similar to the **Biblical fall** of man in the **Garden of Eden**, as Adam disobeyed God's orders. Macduff emphasises this belief that the king is **divinely ordained** and is therefore loyal to him. He associated Duncan with **piety and virtue** as he is aligned with God.

- He also recognises that the murder will have greater consequences for Scotland as he states "**see the great doom's image**", which is a reference to judgment day. This suggests that he sees the **death of the king** as comparable to the end of the world – complete loyalty and devotion, or that perhaps, ending a **divine bloodline's** right to the throne would enrage God. The **natural order** has been disturbed and thus **chaos will ensue**, like at the end of the world.



KEY CHARACTERISTICS

- **Sensitive:** Macduff differs from the other male characters in the play; he publically exhibits **emotional behaviour**, something which was considered a **feminine trait** at the



time. Macduff's violence is not dangerous like Macbeth's as it comes from love for his country and family; it is "**grief convert to anger**". This is demonstrated through the **very emotional reaction** to the death of his family.

- Macduff believes that Macbeth must have "**no children**" to explain how he can live with a **guilty conscience of killing Macduff's children**. This also means that there is no way for Macbeth to receive retribution, as Macduff has no way to deliver a pain equal to having his own children killed. Nothing Macduff can do will **truly pay for this pain** – not even killing Macbeth; losing family is a greater pain than death.
- Macduff's disbelief is evidenced through Shakespeare's use of many **rhetorical questions** and the **repetition** of questions he has already asked: "**all my pretty ones?**" "**my children too?**" "**my wife kill'd too?**". These reveal his **flabbergasted** state as he cannot imagine that someone could even do that. This contrasts to Macbeth, as his **selfish ambition** is put before all else, including emotional sensitivity and morals.
- **Patriotic:** Shakespeare portrays Macbeth as a man who adores Scotland and feels as though he must save it from the tyranny of Macbeth's rule. He is the one to recognise that Macbeth's reign brings chaos to Scotland and sets about creating an opposition to Macbeth.
 - Macduff uses the **motif of personifying Scotland**, as Macbeth is causing Scotland to "**bleed bleed poor country**". Shakespeare uses this technique in order to **symbolise** how Scotland is dying because the 'Great Chain of Being' has been subverted.
 - The 'Great Chain of Being' is a **hierarchical social structure**, which dictated who had authority over who (the King was at the top of the hierarchy, just under God).
 - Shakespeare evidences Macduff's care for all of Scotland through the use of **parallelism** as "**new widows howl, new orphans cry**" demonstrates that Macduff is considering the detrimental effects of Macbeth's reign, **holistically** (as a whole). Hence he left his own wife and children to try and save the women and children of the whole country. This contrasts Macbeth, as Macduff acts for the good of others, not the good of himself. While Macbeth's allegiance is to himself and his wife, Macduff's is to Scotland.



KEY MOMENTS

SC	OCCURRENCE	SIGNIFICANCE
1.6	Macduff is introduced to the audience.	Macduff is introduced to the audience amongst a series of other characters, and doesn't speak in this scene. By introducing him in a scene where he has no lines, the audience do not suspect that by the end of the play, he will be a character which enacts revenge on Macbeth and a character which will hold a great deal of power.
2.3	Macduff discovers Duncan's death.	Macduff's complete loyalty to Duncan and adherence to the ' Divine Right of Kings ' is demonstrated through a very emotional reaction to the death and Shakespeare's use of the group of three " O horror, horror, horror " revealing Macduff's distress and also his honour. Shakespeare employs repetition to emphasise the strength of this emotion. Macduff adopts the role of the judge in this play – he knows Macbeth is in the wrong. He will act on God's behalf (in the absence of Duncan) to bring justice upon Macbeth. Judgment day for Macbeth – his actions will result in eternal damnation.
4.1	Macbeth receives warning from an apparition (conjured by the Witches) that he should be wary of Macduff.	Though Macduff doesn't appear in this scene, the Witches conjure an apparition which warns Macbeth that he should "beware Macduff, beware the Thane of Fife". This works to set Macduff up as Macbeth's foil, as he becomes suspicious of what Macduff could do to him.
4.2	Macduff's family is killed by Macbeth	This is the ultimate 'trigger' for Macduff: he has left his family in the country he loves in order to help rid his country of Macbeth - this shows the choice he has made between his family and his country, which causes the death of his loved ones. This provides Macduff with even more rationale to enact his revenge on Macbeth.
4.3	Malcom suspects that Macduff may be working for Macbeth so tests him to see if he is trustworthy. He also finds out that his family has been killed in this scene, and promises	Malcom's test involves talking to Macduff about why he wouldn't be fit to be the King of Scotland, and though Macduff initially disagrees politely, he eventually agrees, proving his allegiance to Scotland and as an ally to Malcom. This shows him as both a truthful and loyal character.



	revenge on Macbeth for this.	
5.8	Macduff kills Macbeth	<p>In this scene, Shakespeare utilises the character of Macduff to restore order to the play, by ensuring that it is Macduff who brings an end to the tyrannous reign of Macbeth, rather than Malcolm. Arguably, Shakespeare does this so that Malcolm's reign isn't tainted by violence and he is able to maintain his own purity. Macduff has the strongest reason to kill Macbeth: revenge. Therefore, this killing from emotion is perceived as more acceptable by the audience. This reveals the ambivalence and double sense of the witches' prophecies and forces Macbeth to realise his mistake in trusting them. He was warned of Macduff all along but chose to interpret the prophecies to suit his own ambitions. It is only then that Macbeth realises the witches were "juggling fiends" and recognise the truth in a classical moment of anagnorisis (the point in a play, where a principal character recognises or discovers another character's true identity). Macduff, therefore, is symbolic of a bringer of truth and he calls Macbeth what he is – "tyrant" "hellhound" "bloodier villain". He brings truth to the deception that has been Macbeth's reign, exposing him for what he is and purges Scotland of its illness: "bleed bleed poor country"; the blood that must be bled is Macbeth's.</p>

RELATIONSHIPS

Malcolm | Both Malcom and Macduff hold an immense amount of **loyalty** and **patriotism** towards their country, and this is crucial as it leads to Macbeth's removal from the throne. Malcom tests Macduff's loyalty in the play, which Macduff succeeds in and hence proves to the audience that Macduff is a character to be trusted.

Macbeth | Macduff is eventually the character who kills Macbeth in the play.

EXAM TIP!

You will develop your AO2 for characterisation, if you are able to include a direct comparison between the characters of Macbeth and Macduff.

Ross | Ross is part of the army which eventually overthrows Macbeth, and is a Thane. He is the one who tells Macduff that Macbeth has murdered his family. He serves as a character who



delivers news both to the characters and audience in the play, and Macduff is part of this deliverance.

King Duncan | Macduff shows great loyalty to King Duncan, and is the character who finds him dead after Macbeth murders him.

KEY QUOTES

"lest our old robes sit easier than our new"

- Here, Shakespeare reveals Macduff's **bleak perception of a future Scotland** under Macbeth as he uses the **extended metaphor** of predicting Scotland will change for the worse.
 - He suggests there will be **chaos and a divergence** from the peace of the past

Macduff opposes Macbeth's rule: ***"fit to govern? No not to live!"***

- Through Shakespeare's use of **rhetorical question** and **hypophora** (a question is raised and immediately answered) emphasise Macduff's strong hatred of **tyranny** and complete loyalty to Scotland.
 - He resents **tyranny** and this is clear through his immediate attempts to oppose Macbeth with an army from England. In the scene 4.3, **Malcolm tests Macduff** to see if he is **in fact a man of principal**. It is when Malcolm changes from **character flaws** (like greed and lust) to the disruption of Scotland's order that Macduff rejects him. This is evident as Malcolm suggests that ***"I should pour the sweet milk of concord into hell"***.

"thy hope ends here"

- This demonstrates Macduff's pessimistic outlook – he would not be able to live in happiness if Scotland was ruled by a **tyrant**.
- Malcolm also tests Macduff and proves him not to be **naïve**; he will not accept something that wouldn't be good for the country as he shows great emotion towards the **well-being of the country**.



"he is noble, wise, judicious".

- Here, Ross is defending Macduff, and the audience are provided with an initial view of Macduff as a trustworthy and calculating leader.

"Cruel are the times when we are traitor and do not know ourselves"

- Macduff is only doing what he thinks is best for Scotland in not being a traitor to Scotland, but he is a traitor to his family as he could only save one.
 - In doing this, Macduff becomes the **complete foil** to Macbeth, who conversely obeys his wife and is a traitor to his country.

"Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope the lord's anointed temple"

- Shakespeare uses this **metaphorical language**, in stating that Duncan's body was a "**temple**", in order to reinforce the holiness of Duncan's reign.
 - He recognises Duncan as the true, **divinely ordained**, King.
 - This demonstrates Macduff's loyalty to Scotland, in addition to his intensely patriotic nature.

"new widows howl new orphans cry".

- Macduff kills Macbeth after the murder of his wife and children, as he is fighting for his family, but also for all the women and children in Scotland, which is evidenced through the Shakespeare's use of **zoomorphism**.
 - The **verb "howl"** cultivates a greater sense of **sympathy** for these orphans - like abandoned puppies.

EXAM TIP!

When analysing language techniques, ensure you refer to "Shakespeare" explicitly.
 This shows the examiner that you are considering his methods directly.



AQA English Literature Paper 1

Macbeth



Revision booklet

REMINDER

In the exam, **you will be presented with a short extract** from the play.

There will only be ONE question on Macbeth – you MUST answer it!

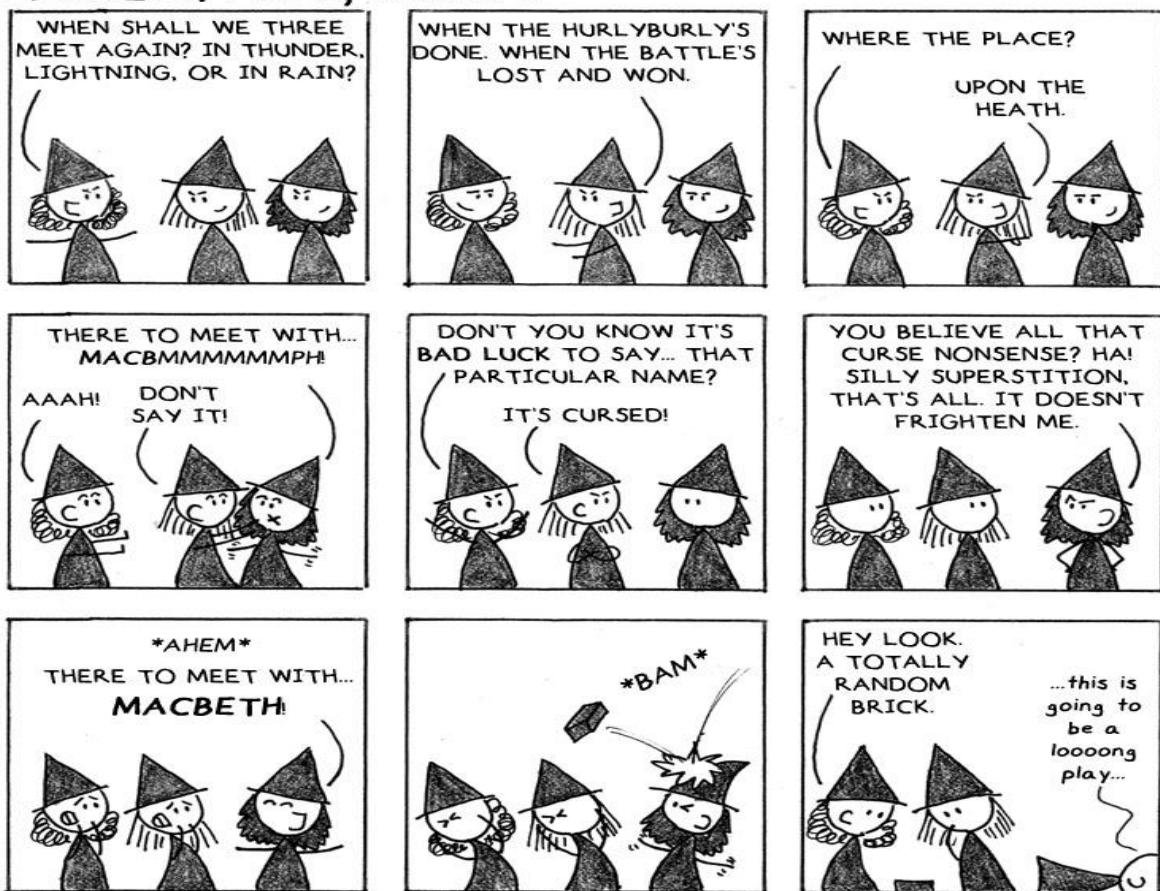
The question will ask you to focus on the extract (examiners expect to see close language analysis) and then relate it to elsewhere in the play, so you can show your understanding of the whole play.

You are advised to spend 45 minutes writing your response to Macbeth and then 5 minutes carefully proof-reading it for SPAG accuracy!

(You then spend the next 50 minutes in this exam writing your response to the question on Dickens' novel, 'A Christmas Carol'.)

SPAG is marked for your Macbeth answer – so spend 5 minutes checking and correcting any mistakes you might have made when writing against the clock!

MACBETH: Act 1, Scene 1



Macbeth: 'a chain of events'



Macbeth: Some important historical, social and cultural contexts

Up until Henry VIII chose to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, England was a country where people practised the Roman Catholic faith, under the leadership of the Pope in Rome. Henry wanted to divorce Catherine of Aragon for several reasons: mainly, he had not fallen in love with her; in fact, she was supposed to marry Henry's brother, Arthur, but he died. Put simply, when Henry became king of England, he appealed to the Pope in Rome to annul his marriage to Catherine but the Pope refused, saying that marriage was a lifelong contract agreed in church in the presence of God.

Henry decided to divorce himself and the English kingdom from the Catholic church. He established the Church of England and, as the reigning monarch, installed himself as the head of the Church of England. He set about dismantling the abbeys throughout his kingdom, seizing all the precious gold and silver, jewel-encrusted ornaments for himself and his new branch of Christianity became known as Protestantism (because of the protests made to Rome regarding his divorce).

This led to very deep divisions between people throughout England. In your own lifetime, a comparable divide is the recent Brexit campaign and result, which is still on everyone's lips and which remains the cause of some social and political tension, unrest, and disagreement in our society.

The unrest caused by Henry's decision to split from the Catholic church continued long after his own lifetime. When he died, his daughter became Queen Elizabeth I and, like her father, she was a Protestant. During her lifetime there were several assassination attempts and plots to overthrow her by Catholics who wished to return England to the supreme leadership of the Pope in Rome. Some of those plots were led by Elizabeth's own catholic cousin, Mary – Queen of Scots.

Elizabeth grew tired of Mary's plots and eventually agreed to her execution. Following Mary's beheading, her son James became James VI of Scotland and when the childless Elizabeth I grew old and died, James seized the throne of England and became the first King James of England.

King James I and the Gunpowder Plot

Before ascending to the throne of England, James has begun to build a trusting relationship with Elizabeth I, although English Catholics hoped he would show them more tolerance than she had. Despite this, James was as intolerant of Catholics as Elizabeth and consequently, Catholic plots to assassinate King James formed. The most famous of these assassination attempts is known as ***The Gunpowder Plot*** of 1605. Interestingly, to commemorate King James' lucky escape a medal was commissioned showing a snake concealed by flowers. In the play, when plotting the regicide of King Duncan, Lady Macbeth tells her husband: "***Look like the innocent flower/But be the serpent under't.***"



Above: the medal issued to commemorate the failed assassination of King James I

Also, one of the men involved in the Gunpowder Plot, Everard Digby, had been a close friend of King James and in the play is probably mirrored by the treasonous thane of Cawdor. No wonder King Duncan says of the thane of Cawdor: "*There's no art/To find the mind's construction in the face./He was a gentleman on whom I built/An absolute trust.*" King James, sitting in the audience watching the very first performance of '*Macbeth*', knew only too well the sense of betrayal expressed by King Duncan here.

Lastly, a major theme in the play is that of **equivocation**, which means to tell deliberately misleading half-truths. The witches equivocate in the play because they inform Macbeth that "**No man born of a woman**" can harm him, leading him to imagine himself to be invincible and that he will be unbeaten until Birnam Wood (a forest) moves towards his castle. Importantly, Macbeth's noble friend, Banquo, does warn Macbeth about the witches and their prophecies when he advises: "*Oftentimes, to win us to our harm the instruments of darkness tells us truths, win us with honest trifles, to betray's in deepest consequence.*"

So, in what way might the theme of equivocation be connected to historical, social and cultural contexts? Well, in 1606 a Catholic priest named Henry Garnet was accused of treason, for the role he played in the Gunpowder Plot. When he was put on trial, he was found guilty of committing a crime called **perjury** (giving false evidence to the court) but he claimed the right to equivocate (to tell deliberately misleading half-truths) in self-defence. So, not only was equivocation a burning issue in England when Shakespeare was writing the play but events which unfold within it perhaps also reflects his personal view of it: namely, people who equivocate are not to be trusted – whether they are witches in 11th century Scotland or Catholic priests in 17th century England.

King James I and Witchcraft

Belief in witches and witchcraft was widespread across Europe during the 16 and 17th centuries and during the reign of Elizabeth I, persecution of people accused of witchcraft reached terrifying proportions. Hundreds of people – mostly women – were tortured, convicted and then executed for this crime between 1560 and 1603 in England.

People genuinely believed that witches possessed diabolical powers: it was believed that witches could fly, sail in sieves, create night during the day (we call this a solar eclipse today), cause fogs and storms, disease and even a person or an animal to die because of a curse. A witches curse was believed to have the power to cause infertility or to induce nightmares. Witches were also believed to be able to conjure spirits by concocting a horrible brew, typically made using animal entrails and other nauseating ingredients. When Lady Macbeth conjures evil spirits, the Jacobean audience watching the play would have identified her as a witch inviting spirits to take possession of her body. They would have been horrified that she so willingly condemns her Christian soul to Hell because of her lust for power.

In 1604 when Shakespeare was writing the play, an Act of Parliament decreed that the punishment for those convicted of witchcraft would be execution. Confessions, however, were typically extracted by means of torture, involving the crushing of limbs, the breaking of bones or by applying boiling water or oil to the body of the accused. Others might have believed themselves to be witches, or confessed to being a witch because they suffered from delusions which are recognised today as psychiatric illnesses.

King James himself was just as fascinated by ideas about witches and witchcraft. In 1590 it was alleged that a group of witches had plotted to kill him. One of the accused – Agnes Sampson – claimed during her trial to have sailed out to sea in a sieve whereupon she threw various body parts of a cat into the sea, casting a spell which would raise a storm so ferocious it would sink the king's ship. Shakespeare includes subtle references to this trial in Act 1 scene 3 when the first witch, speaking of a sailor, proclaims: "*In a sieve I'll thither sail ... Though his bark cannot be lost/Yet it shall be tempest-tossed.*" King James would, no doubt, have drawn parallels between this and the events of his own life because he personally interrogated one of the people accused, a man named Dr. Fian, before the trial.

So fascinated did he become through his personal involvement in the trial, King James personally investigated other cases of witchcraft. In fact, in 1597 he published a book called '*Daemonologie*' (today, we'd spell it *Demonology* – meaning, 'the study of demons') and later, when he became King of England, he decreed that the book must be printed.

England during the reign of King James I was a deeply religious place. Despite the deep divisions which existed between Protestants and Catholics, virtually everyone believed in the concept of Heaven and Hell and they lived in fear of eternal damnation. Jacobean audiences would have been very familiar with the 'signs' to look out for in a person suffering demonic possession. These signs feature prominently in the play and would have been much more obvious to a Jacobean audience than to me or you watching the play in the 21st century. The signs are these:

- **Trance** – "Look how our partner's rapt" or entranced, says Banquo of Macbeth
- **Inability to pray** – "Amen/Stuck in my throat," says Macbeth to his wife
- **Visions** – "Is this a dagger I see before me?" says Macbeth as he waits to commit regicide
- **Invitations to demonic possession** – "Come, you spirits" invites Lady Macbeth

Shakespeare presents Macbeth and his wife as damned people who invite, and are seized by, demonic possession. Perhaps Shakespeare is also subtly reminding Jacobean audiences of the fate that they, too, can expect if they try to remove their Catholic king, James I, from the throne of England as people had tried – and failed – to do only a year before the play's first performance.



Above: a portrait of King James 1, painted in 1611

'SLASH AND TRASH'

Summarising key points from a text

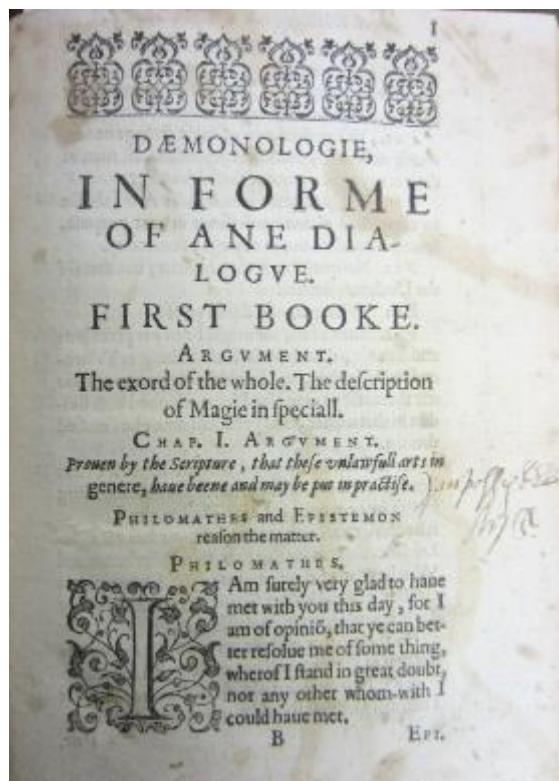
TASK: You are going to produce **two** summaries, using your own words and some judiciously chosen, brief quotations to embed in your own sentences on the following topics:

- (1) King James and the Gunpowder Plot
- (2) King James and Witchcraft



Here's what to do:

- 1: Using your highlighter pen, SLASH (or highlight) ONLY the key points made (the rest will be TRASH)
- 2: List these phrases you have highlighted as a series of bullet points in your book for reference
- 3: Now, decide how you will group the bullet points into a couple of paragraphs
- 4: Write your summary. Remember to include **brief, embedded** quotations.
- 5: Repeat steps 1 to 4 for your **second** summary.



Above: The first page of **Daemonologie**, written by King James I

Character Analysis: Lady Macbeth

Lady Macbeth is the deuteragonist (second most significant character) in this drama: the wife of Macbeth, she shares his lust for power. Our initial impressions of Lady Macbeth are that she is, as Malcolm describes her at the close of the play as “**fiend-like**” as, when she learns of Duncan’s visit to Dunsinane her thoughts turn immediately to regicide. Without pause, she summons evil “**spirits**” and commands them to “**make thick my blood**” so that “**no compunctions visitings of Nature**” shake her wicked intention to murder the King.

Interestingly, in this soliloquy Lady Macbeth imagines committing the regicide herself as she asks to be wrapped in the blackest smoke of Hell “**so that my keen knife sees not the wound it makes.**” Later, she privately admits in an aside: “**Had he not looked like my father as he slept, I had done’t,**” suggesting that Lady Macbeth is not as “fiend-like” as is sometimes argued. Certainly, she is not naturally “**fiend-like**” or she would not have sought assistance from the “**murdering ministers**” she conjures when the audience first meet her, even though she willingly submits to their wicked influence.

It is arguable that Lady Macbeth is subconsciously repelled by the thought of regicide because when she is pressuring her husband to commit the deed she avoids using the word “murder”; instead she employs a variety of euphemisms, including: “**this enterprise**”, Duncan being “**provided for**” or merely “**it**”. However, others argue that Shakespeare’s employment of euphemisms here is quite deliberate and serves subtly to convey Lady Macbeth’s wily, artful manipulation of her husband and which, therefore, strengthens the audience impression of her as being truly “**fiend-like**”.

However, once the regicide is committed and Lady Macbeth becomes Queen, the dynamics of her relationship with Macbeth undergoes a dramatic transformation. Despite having fulfilled her ambition to become Queen, in an aside to the audience Lady Macbeth privately admits: “**Nought’s had, all’s spent, where our desire is got without content.**” Ironically, when her husband then enters her own face becomes a mask, disguising what is in her heart as she admonishes Macbeth for entertaining gloomy thoughts which ought to have been buried alongside the body of the dead King Duncan.

As her ability to influence her husband diminishes – he simply ignores her command to halt his murderous plans for Banquo when she demands: “**You must leave this**” – Lady Macbeth becomes an increasingly isolated figure. After the banquet scene at which Macbeth arouses suspicions by his erratic behaviour, Lady Macbeth tells him: “**You lack the season of all natures – sleep.**” Ironically, the audience’s final impressions of her are in Act 5 scene 1 where she is sleepwalking, burdened by guilt.

The bold figure who instructed evil spirits to “**pall thee in the dunnett smoke of Hell**” is now a pathetic figure, afraid of the dark. Lady Macbeth’s gentlewoman tells the Doctor observing her sleepwalk: “**She has light by her continually – ‘tis her command.**” The evil she so willingly embraced betrays her – as it betrays Macbeth – and produces only anguish in place of the rewards she had envisioned. On the night of Duncan’s murder, their hands bathed in Duncan’s blood, she boldly claimed: “**A little water clears us of this deed.**” Now, however, she seems unable to rid herself of the stench and spots of blood she imagines cover her hands still. The Doctor fears she is suicidal and claims: “**more needs she the Divine than the physician.**”

Task: Use the information on this page to create a character summary of Lady Macbeth. Focus on how Shakespeare uses Lady Macbeth, how she relates to the context and how an audience might respond to her.

Character analysis: Macbeth

Macbeth is the protagonist in this tragedy: a tragic hero whose hamartia – the fatal flaw in his character - is his ambition, a lust for power shared by his wife. He is aware of the evil his ambition gives rise to but he is unable to overcome the temptation.

Often, Lady Macbeth is wrongly accused of inviting Macbeth to contemplate regicide. In fact, after his encounter with the witches in Act 1 scene 3, Macbeth himself considers regicide when he reflects on their prophecy and admits:

**"If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?"**

He is here acknowledging that the thing he is contemplating – usurping King Duncan's crown - is "**against the use of nature.**"

Wracked by doubts, in Act 1 scene 7 as he contemplates the regicide, Macbeth wavers and informs his wife: "**We will proceed no further in *this business*.**" Unlike his wife's wily, artful avoidance of the word "murder" during this conversation, it is clear that Macbeth uses a euphemism here because the very thought of murder frightens him, let alone the deed. Even when criticised and challenged by Lady Macbeth, he retains the moral sensibility to declare: "**I dare do all may become a man. / Who dares do more is none.**"

Having submitted to his wife's artful persuasion, Macbeth kills Duncan but is immediately plagued by his conscience. He tells how he "**could not say Amen**" and of a voice that foretold sleeplessness as punishment for such a heinous act.

Though Macbeth is influenced by both the witches and his wife, Macbeth is not controlled by them. His story is one of moral choice and the consequences of that choice. Once Duncan is murdered, Macbeth withdraws from Lady Macbeth and all subsequent murders in this play are the products of Macbeth's own paranoia and desperate desire to cling to power "**on this bank and shoal of time**" here on Earth, knowing he has been condemned to an eternity in Hell for killing God's anointed representative on Earth.

Having murdered Banquo and Macduff's family, Macbeth's paranoia gives way to a more fundamental disorder. In Act 5 we watch as he prepares to defend his kingdom – reduced to his castle at Dunsinane – and he swings violently between fits of rage and despair. Evidently, he has lost any emotional connection to his fellow men, declares that he is "**sick at heart**" and has "**lived long enough**". When informed of his wife's death, he is completely unmoved and instead reflects on the meaninglessness of life itself. Macbeth is a tragic hero precisely because he does not accept his evil callously; he suffers for it. In his own words: "**To know my deed, 'twere best not know myself.**"

Task: Use the information on this page to create a character summary of Macbeth. Focus on how Shakespeare uses Macbeth, how he relates to the context and how an audience might respond to him.

Character Analysis: Banquo

Banquo might best be described as a minor character in the tragedy of Macbeth. Nevertheless, he has an important function in the play and is considered by many to be an effective dramatic foil for Macbeth. It is through Banquo's interactions with Macbeth and his own motivations that the audience – through contrast – gain insights into Macbeth's nature also.

Alike in many ways, Banquo and Macbeth are equals as the play begins: both are Scottish “**captains**” defending Duncan’s realm against the marauding Norwegians led by Sweno. They fight honourably and are heroic warriors, risking their lives in defence of Duncan’s kingdom. However, after the battle when they encounter the “**weird sisters**” on the “**blasted heath**”, Banquo’s dramatic function is to demonstrate to an audience that the temptations of the witches may be successfully resisted and that Macbeth therefore acts from free will. Banquo expresses unshakeable moral principles and warns his friend that the witches may well be “**instruments of darkness**” who “**tell us truths**” in order to “**win us to our harm**” and to “**betray us in deepest consequence.**” Banquo’s concern contrasts strikingly with Macbeth’s own susceptibility to the witches.

Banquo’s resistance to the influence of evil serves to highlight Macbeth’s failure to resist and foregrounds his tendency towards evil, stimulated by ambition - the flaw that makes the tragedy possible.

Prompted by paranoid insecurity, when Macbeth decides to murder Banquo he acknowledges Banquo’s endearing qualities: his “**royalty of nature**”, his “**wisdom**” and his “**dauntless**” or fearless nature. This resentment of Banquo’s natural superiority, together with jealousy of his destiny as a “**father to a line of kings**”, motivates Macbeth to commit further wicked murders in the second half of the play, commencing with Banquo’s and the attempted murder of his son and heir, Fleance.

Banquo’s fate is determined by his virtue, just as Macbeth’s is determined by his villainy.

Task: Use the information on this page to create a character summary of Banquo. Focus on how Shakespeare uses Banquo, how he relates to the context and how an audience might respond to him.

Character Analysis: The Weird Sisters (Witches)

The weird sisters are an unholy trinity, a trio of malevolent, supernatural characters whose function in the drama is to encourage Macbeth in his evil inclinations.

Though their appearances in the play are brief, they have an important function. Shakespeare establishes the supernatural theme via their association with disorder in Nature: they appear amid thunder and lightning in a grim meeting on a “**blasted heath**” which contributes greatly to the tone of mysterious evil which pervades the play.

Likewise, the supernatural world they represent is terrifying to an audience because it is beyond human control and in the play it is symbolic of the unpredictable force of human desire, such as Macbeth’s ruthless ambition to become King.

At their first appearance, the weird sisters state an ambiguity that Shakespeare weaves through the play: “**Fair is foul, and foul is fair.**” Indeed, the witches’ relationship with Macbeth is so entwined that the first line he speaks in the play is an echo of this riddle. He says: “**So fair and foul a day I have not seen.**”

The deceptive pictures of the future – in their initial prediction of Macbeth becoming King and later in the riddles given by the Apparitions which rise from the cauldron when Macbeth visits the witches for a second time – encourage in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth a false sense of what is desirable and possible. The magic of the witches, then, is their ability to create moral disruption which, in Macbeth’s case, leads to his death and subsequent damnation.

It is important to remember that while the witches may have “**more in them than mortal knowledge**”, they do not control Macbeth. They merely put ideas into his mind on which he then decides for himself. He is the master of his own destiny and acts out of free will.

Task: Use the information on this page to create a character summary of the witches. Focus on how Shakespeare uses the witches, how they relate to the context and how an audience might respond to them.

At this point in the play, Banquo and Macbeth have just met the witches. The witches have just told Macbeth he will one day be the King of Scotland.

BANQUO Good sir, why do you start; and seem to fear Things that do sound so fair? I' the name of truth, Are ye fantastical, or that indeed Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner You greet with present grace and great prediction Of noble having and of royal hope, That he seems rapt withal: to me you speak not. If you can look into the seeds of time, And say which grain will grow and which will not, Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear Your favours nor your hate.	5
First Witch Hail!	10
Second Witch Hail!	
Third Witch Hail!	
First Witch Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.	15
Second Witch Not so happy, yet much happier.	
Third Witch Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none: So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!	
First Witch Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!	
MACBETH Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more: By Sinel's death I know I am thane of Glamis; But how of Cawdor? The thane of Cawdor lives, A prosperous gentleman; and to be king Stands not within the prospect of belief, No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence You owe this strange intelligence? or why Upon this blasted heath you stop our way With such prophetic greeting? Speak, I charge you. <i>(The Witches vanish)</i>	20 25

Q1: Starting with this conversation, explain how far Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a character who believes in the **supernatural power of the witches**.

Write about:

- How Shakespeare presents Macbeth's reaction to the witches here
- How Shakespeare presents his beliefs in them elsewhere in the play.

Things to read / think / write about:

READ the character analysis of the Witches

- Macbeth's dramatic reaction to the predictions delivered by the “**weird sisters**”. It is so striking that Banquo observes Macbeth’s facial expression and addresses him directly (see lines 1 – 2).
- Banquo’s remark to the witches about Macbeth being “**rapt withal**”. Discuss the significance of this in the context of Macbeth’s belief in the **supernatural**.
- Shakespeare’s choice of **imperative verbs** when Macbeth commands the weird sisters (twice on line 20 and again on line 28).
- The significance of a series of questions addressed directly to the witches and Shakespeare’s choice of **diction** in Macbeth’s opinion that the witches possess “**strange intelligence**”. What does this series of questions convey to an **audience** about Macbeth’s belief in, and attitude towards, the **supernatural**?
- Consider the use of **dramatic irony** here, too. The **audience** is aware that Duncan has decreed the title Thane of Cawdor is to pass to Macbeth for his bravery in battle. Is Shakespeare trying to shape the audience’s opinion of belief in the **supernatural**?
- Consider Macbeth’s aside shortly after the first prediction is realised when Ross brings news that Duncan has bestowed the title Thane of Cawdor on Macbeth. In an **aside**, Macbeth reflects on the encounter and remarks: “**This supernatural soliciting/Cannot be good, cannot be ill.**” Discuss the significance of Macbeth’s uncertainty about the **supernatural** being good or evil here.
- Contrast this with Banquo’s very different reaction to the witches and the advice he gives to Macbeth: “**And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.**”
- Macbeth’s ignorance of Banquo’s advice and later visit to the witches. Explain what motivates him to visit them and what this conveys to an audience about his belief in their abilities, given his later bold claim that he bears “**a charmed life**” which “**must not yield / To one of woman born.**”
- The futility and **irony** of Macbeth’s final comment in the play, to Macduff: “**damned be he who first cries, ‘Hold – enough!’**” in the context of having already surrendered his soul to the devil for committing the act of regicide.

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE: Explore how Shakespeare presents Macbeth as a character who believes in the supernatural power of the witches.

Explain ONE aspect of Shakespeare's presentation of character / theme / setting <i>Shakespeare presents ... as</i>	
Provide some evidence in the form of a quotation or reference to the text. <i>(Don't limit yourself to one quotation or reference!)</i>	
ZOOM IN to the quotation. <i>(Try to show your understanding of Shakespeare's deliberate use of language to achieve certain effects. Use <u>connectives</u> to develop the layers of your analysis.)</i>	
ZOOM OUT to one or more of the following, as appropriate: <i>Link your close analysis to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The rest of the play</i>• <i>A key theme</i>• <i>Social, historical or cultural contexts</i>	
Conclude: <i>by linking back to your opening point, making a deeper comment about the character / theme / setting, based on your analysis and exploration.</i>	

Macbeth

Read the following extract from Act 1 Scene 5 of Macbeth and then answer the question that follows.

At this point in the play Lady Macbeth is speaking. She has just received the news that King Duncan will be spending the night at her castle.

The raven himself is hoarse That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan Under my battlements. Come, you spirits That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood; Stop up the access and passage to remorse, That no compunctionous visitings of nature Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts, And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers, Wherever in your sightless substances You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night, And pall thee in the dunkest smoke of hell, That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, To cry 'Hold, hold!'	5	10	15
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Q1: Starting with this speech, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a **powerful woman**.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in the play as a whole. [30 marks]

SPAG [4 marks]

Things you might write about:

- The **connotations** of the “*raven*” and her use of the adjective “*fatal*” to describe Duncan’s entrance to Dunsinane castle. What does it convey about her immediate thoughts and reactions to Macbeth’s letter?
- Summoning evil spirits. Explain clearly **what** Lady Macbeth invites the “*murdering ministers*” to do to her body and **why** she requests their assistance.
- The fact she imagines committing the regicide **herself** in this **soliloquy**: she refers to the weapon as “*my keen knife*”. However, she does not later commit the crime herself. What reason does she give for not doing so, in an **aside** to the audience in Act 2 scene 2, lines 15 – 16? Explain what impressions this **private admission** conveys about Lady Macbeth’s character to the audience.
- Think now about **Act 3 scene 2**, where we first see Lady Macbeth as Queen. In an **aside** to the audience at the opening of this scene, explain what feelings she **privately** admits to, now that her **ambition** to be queen has been fulfilled.
- Now think about our **final impressions** of Lady Macbeth, in **Act 5 scene 1**. Write about the significance of having “*light by her continually*” and how this links to her desire to be wrapped in “*the dunnett smoke of Hell*” when first contemplating Duncan’s murder. Explain also the **irony** of her constantly rubbing her hands, given her comment to Macbeth on the night of Duncan’s murder: “*A little water clears us of this deed.*”

KEY WORD VOCABULARY: try to use these words in your response. Check spelling of key terms.

soliloquy	audience	impression	initial	admission	ambitious
fiendish	determined	callous	ironic	significant	aside

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE: Explain how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as a powerful woman.

Explain ONE aspect of Shakespeare's presentation of character / theme / setting <i>Shakespeare presents ... as</i>	
Provide some evidence in the form of a quotation or reference to the text. <i>(Don't limit yourself to one quotation or reference!)</i>	
ZOOM IN to the quotation. <i>(Try to show your understanding of Shakespeare's deliberate use of language to achieve certain effects. Use <u>connectives</u> to develop the layers of your analysis.)</i>	
ZOOM OUT to one or more of the following, as appropriate: <i>Link your close analysis to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The rest of the play</i>• <i>A key theme</i>• <i>Social, historical or cultural contexts</i>	
Conclude: <i>by linking back to your opening point, making a deeper comment about the character / theme / setting, based on your analysis and exploration.</i>	

At this point in the play, Macbeth has decided he will not kill King Duncan. He is just about to share this news with his wife, Lady Macbeth.

MACBETH

We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

5

LADY MACBETH

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

10

MACBETH

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

15

LADY MACBETH

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

20

Q1: Starting with this conversation, explain how far you think Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as the **dominant partner** in this relationship.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth in this speech
- how Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth elsewhere in the play. [30 marks]

SPAG [4 marks]

Things to think and write about:

FIRST – Read the character analysis of Lady Macbeth. Highlight useful points and consider where you might synthesise them into your response.

- Comment on Lady Macbeth's violent emotional reaction to Macbeth's decision. Comment on **Shakespeare's choice of imagery** here, where Macbeth's "**hope**" is **personified** by Lady Macbeth in a scathing criticism of his cowardice (see lines 6 to 9).
- Comment on Macbeth's attempt to assert **his dominance** in this exchange (see lines 17 to 19). Is it successful? What is Macbeth's view of murder here? How is it different from hers?
- Her use of **euphemisms** (on lines 21 and 22) to cleverly avoid having to use the word "murder", given Macbeth's announcement in this exchange that he will not commit the deed. How does this show **her dominance** in their relationship?
- Explain how the **dynamics** of their relationship changes once Macbeth usurps Duncan's throne. Consider their disagreement over Macbeth's plans for Banquo in Act 3 scene 2. How does Lady Macbeth try to assert **her dominance** in that conversation (see Act 3 Scene 2, lines 25 to 40)? Is she successful?
- Our **final impressions** of her: a pitiable, tragic and troubled woman, frightened of the "**dunkest smoke of Hell**" she so willingly asked to be wrapped in at the beginning of the play.

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE: Explain how far Shakespeare presents Lady Macbeth as the dominant partner in this relationship.

Explain ONE aspect of Shakespeare's presentation of character / theme / setting <i>Shakespeare presents ... as</i>	
Provide some evidence in the form of a quotation or reference to the text. <i>(Don't limit yourself to one quotation or reference!)</i>	
ZOOM IN to the quotation. <i>(Try to show your understanding of Shakespeare's deliberate use of language to achieve certain effects. Use <u>connectives</u> to develop the layers of your analysis.)</i>	
ZOOM OUT to one or more of the following, as appropriate: <i>Link your close analysis to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The rest of the play</i>• <i>A key theme</i>• <i>Social, historical or cultural contexts</i>	
Conclude: <i>by linking back to your opening point, making a deeper comment about the character / theme / setting, based on your analysis and exploration.</i>	

This is from Act 3 scene 1 of the play. At this point in the play, Macbeth is now king of Scotland. His friend Banquo expresses his private fears that Macbeth was involved in the murder of King Duncan.

BANQUO

Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weird women promised, and, I fear,
Thou play'dst most foully for't: yet it was said
It should not stand in thy posterity,
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,
And set me up in hope? But hush! no more.

5

10

Enter MACBETH, as king, LADY MACBETH, as queen, LENNOX, ROSS, Lords, Ladies, 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

To-night we hold a solemn supper sir,
And I'll request your presence.

15

BANQUO

Let your highness
Command upon me; to the which my duties
Are with a most indissoluble tie
For ever knit.

20

Q1: Starting with this conversation, explain how Shakespeare presents the relationship between Banquo and Macbeth.

Write about:

- how Shakespeare presents their relationship in this conversation
- how Shakespeare presents the relationship elsewhere in the play.

Things to think and write about:

FIRST – Read the character analysis of Banquo. Highlight any useful points.
Think about where and how you might synthesise these points in your response.

- The relationship presented in this extract is one of **mutual - but unspoken - mistrust**. Look closely at **Banquo's aside**, where he reflects on Macbeth's recent gains. Explain what emotion Banquo privately expresses here and what this conveys to the **audience** about the reality of their relationship as friends at this point in the play.
- Macbeth's reference to Banquo as the “**chief guest**” at the “**solemn supper**” to be held later the same evening – an **ironic** comment given Macbeth's **soliloquy** immediately after this conversation when he admits that his “**fears in Banquo stick deep**”, followed by a plot to murder him.
- Explain **Banquo's function** in the play. Discuss the qualities that Banquo and Macbeth have in common. (*Look at the first five lines of Macbeth's soliloquy, Act 3 scene 1 lines 50 to 55, where Macbeth explains what those qualities are!*) Explain why Shakespeare presents these two characters as being so similar in many ways.
- Now, explain the major difference between them and in what way Banquo's **virtue** shapes the **audience's** opinion of Macbeth's **vice**. *You might refer to the way the two men react differently to the witches and their predictions in Act 1 scene 3 to illustrate how they are dissimilar in one very significant way.*
- You might discuss the **significance** and the **irony** of Banquo's ghost honouring Macbeth's request, delivered in this extract: “**To-night we hold a solemn supper sir, / And I'll request your presence.**” Plagued by a guilty conscience, the betrayer is tormented by the ghost of his innocent victim. None of the guests yet know Banquo is dead. Ironically, the guests assume that Macbeth is being haunted by the ghost of someone else, perhaps Duncan. Macbeth's seemingly bizarre conversation with “**a stool**” incriminate him in a murder and so Banquo's initial suspicion in this extract, that Macbeth “**play'dst most foully**” for Duncan's crown is a suspicion now entertained by all the guests at this supposedly “**solemn supper**.”

PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE: Explain how Shakespeare presents the relationship between Macbeth and Banquo.

Explain ONE aspect of Shakespeare's presentation of character / theme / setting <i>Shakespeare presents ... as</i>	
Provide some evidence in the form of a quotation or reference to the text. <i>(Don't limit yourself to one quotation or reference!)</i>	
ZOOM IN to the quotation. <i>(Try to show your understanding of Shakespeare's deliberate use of language to achieve certain effects. Use <u>connectives</u> to develop the layers of your analysis.)</i>	
ZOOM OUT to one or more of the following, as appropriate: <i>Link your close analysis to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>The rest of the play</i>• <i>A key theme</i>• <i>Social, historical or cultural contexts</i>	
Conclude: <i>by linking back to your opening point, making a deeper comment about the character / theme / setting, based on your analysis and exploration.</i>	