

Block

4

SHAKESPEARE: *MACBETH*

Block Introduction

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MACBETH: AN INTRODUCTION

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MACBETH: CRITICAL RESPONSES

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

Block 4: Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

This block is another attempt at treating a literary text comprehensively. Dear student, please keep in mind that the name of the course is “British Poetry and Drama from Fourteenth to Seventeenth Century.” The implication is that that the two forms of literature should be studied closely and in detail. That explains why we have two full-length plays for discussion and analysis in this course.

Without doubt, Shakespeare enjoys a unique place in not just English literature but also in world literature. In this block, you are given a chance to deal with one of the greatest plays of Shakespeare. There are a large number of issues that crop up in *Macbeth*. It is a political play raising issues of governance, harmony in the state and society, human emotions of sympathy and loyalty, and resolution of problems peacefully. There is also interplay here of positive and negative emotions. The block presents the picture of this play in clear terms and takes up stances and attitudes of characters for comment. The subtle ways of statecraft are laid bare with the help of elaboration of stands that different characters adopt. As in Christopher Marlowe’s *Dr. Faustus*, so in *Macbeth* we are face to face with a villain hero. The question raised here whether we should sympathize with Macbeth or reject him as devil in human form. Considered as a play of the Renaissance ethos and one of the many plays that Shakespeare as a humanist writer, we are constrained to look at it with caution. The units in the block link up the play with its context at two levels, as based in the Scottish background and as reflective of the Elizabethan-Jacobean political scene. The block also goes into the aspect of human sympathy that is built upon the sufferings of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The view of the witches and of the power game being played by other lobbies in the plays lends subtlety to the discussion.

UNIT 1 *MACBETH: AN INTRODUCTION*

Structure

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- 1.5 Drama in the Renaissance World
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will acquaint you with the England of Shakespeare's time. It will help you understand the social setting of the period as well as the changes that set in from the reign of Elizabeth. It will also introduce you to Machiavelli's thought. The chapter will also trace briefly the evolution of the stage in Shakespeare's time to help you visualise the experience of theatre-going in those days. This will be followed by a discussion of the historical sources used by Shakespeare for *Macbeth* and the possible date of the play. There will also be a discussion of the idea of humanism and its relation to the world of Shakespeare's plays.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit goes into the aspects of thought and perspective that shaped Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. In our view nothing traditional helped to make sense of whatever was happening in the field of English drama in the closing years of the sixteenth century. Instances coming to mind are the humanist thought and Machiavelli giving version of conceptualising the new scenario. Secondly, within drama, experimentation and innovation were resorted to, for capturing the unfolding trend. Stage in the Elizabethan period and sources of the play *Macbeth* are other crucial areas covered in this unit.

1.2 THE ELIZABETHAN WORLD

Renaissance literally means a re-birth or awakening. It was a rebirth of Classical Greek and Latin literature. It began in the latter half of the sixteenth century and continued into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It has been divided into early, middle-high and late Renaissance (Cuddon 739). The sixteenth century, or the period of high renaissance was rife with changes that led to a re-orientation of the relation between man and the world he inhabited. The renaissance period was marked by a relook at the classics and this helped writers posit a new idea of man who was at the centre of the scheme of things. As the ideas of the renaissance spread to different parts of the world writers responded creatively through various mediums to interpret the position of man in the cosmos. Development in scientific ideas, a shift from the Ptolemaic idea of the universe to that of Copernicus brought in modern view things. Copernicus was to prove that the earth was not the centre of the universe, but it was the sun and the former was only a planet revolving around the latter. This shift was not merely astronomical and had an impact on the way in which man was perceived in the universe. The idea of man at the centre of things was effectively deflected. He was to be seen as part of a kind of organic unity in the universe. The displacement of the

earth, meant that the social groups that were at the centre of things could also be displaced. Coupled with the wisdom of the classics a new phase set in and formed the backdrop to the Elizabethan period.

This was a time of major changes. The authority of the church stood challenged in the protest by King Henry VIII. He wanted to divorce his wife Catharine of Aragon and marry Anne Boleyn. At the outset divorce appeared to be the issue, otherwise not permitted under Catholicism. But at a deeper level this was about consolidating the authority of the monarch and challenging that of the Pope of Rome and the Church. This led to what is known as the period of Reformation and the establishment of Protestant faith. It was followed by a move to restore the powers of the church through Counter-Reformation. But the split in the church had been effected and Protestantism had been established. As Elizabeth came to power she had to contend with dissatisfaction amongst the Catholics and had to struggle to establish her sovereignty.

Under Elizabeth, England moved towards various levels of social mobility. At the level of religion, the Anglican settlement tried to create peace amongst the religious factions. Through the settlement she managed to keep the Protestant spirit alive. In the economic sphere, England was gradually transforming itself into a world of mercantile capital. In the world of kings and queens and the nobility, the traders and merchants also gained both mobility and power in the form of money. This is the world to which Shakespeare belonged. According to Boris Ford:

Though most of Elizabeth's five-million subjects were country dwellers, their prosperity depended on foreign trade; and all the main events of the reign were connected with the rise of merchant capital—the long duel with Spain, ranging from Ireland to the Indies; the raids on Spanish treasure; the sudden expansion of English trade to touch all four of the known continents. (Ford, Boris, ed. *Age of Shakespeare: A Guide to English Literature*. Volume 2. London: Cassell, 1955.17)

The feudal world of England was churning. It was not as if it had transformed itself into a kind of capitalist economy. But one can see the presence in the feudal world of new forces that were gradually gaining power, especially in the wake of travel and trade in other countries. A nobility that was gradually becoming economically weak also meant that other social groups especially the ones who were trading would gain power. The consolidation of power by Elizabeth could be seen in works of literature. Sidney's *Arcadia* (1580) and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590) evidence the power wielded by the queen. The defeat of the Spanish forces with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 further helped Elizabeth consolidate her reign. But the influx of renaissance ideals, the displacement of earth from the centre and the renewed interest in man meant that these ideas would no longer be accepted unquestioningly. Coupled with the economic changes in society there was a new ferment brewing in sixteenth century England. The gentry remained connected to the court even as it started pursuing its own monetary interests. By the end of the sixteenth century they were much better placed and tried to buy estates and be on a par with the nobility.

As Robert Weiman points out,

It was an age of social compromise and economic confusion which yet achieved, politically, a temporary stability and a cultural balance distinctly its own. In the sphere of economics, traditional forms of trade and agriculture existed side by side with the newly emerging modes of capitalist enterprise, and an unprecedented and often conflicting number of heterogeneous developments and activities resulted. The growth of the market, first for commodities, then for land and labour and finally for money, the development of an extensive cloth industry serving overseas export markets (which accelerated enclosures), the extraordinary influx of gold and silver, and the remarkable rise in prices—these and their concomitant factors had proved powerful dissolvents of the traditional economy. (Kettle, Arnold. *Shakespeare in a Changing World: Essays on His times and His Plays*. New York: International Publishers, 1964. 20)

In short you can see that the period of Elizabeth's reign was relatively stable and yet rife with changes at the level of both social and economic structure. The amorphous social group that was gaining gradual

ascendancy was that of the merchants and traders. At the same time the conception of man in society and its representation in literature underwent change. In a more scientific environment, the individual man came to the centre of things.

1.3 HUMANIST THOUGHT

One of the chief ideas that the renaissance brought in was that of a humanistic ideal. From an earlier time when man's relationship with god was a subject of artistic and literary depiction, the renaissance with its scientific thrust looked at man in his own world, rather than one that was not seen. Humanism explored man in terms of its relationships with the people around. As Arnold Kettle explains:

The humanist tradition cannot be described as though it were a set of unchanging ideas, much less a revealed philosophy. It implies, rather, an evolving outlook which has developed with man's increasing knowledge and control of the world he lives in and hence of his own destinies...Humanism in the very nature of things can only be seen and understood in terms of actual human experience and history. (Kettle 11)

Humanism can therefore be looked at as a movement that restored to man the dignity of existence. Man was to be seen, observed and looked at in terms of his relationships with other beings. The idea of man controlling his own destiny becomes sharply felt. Shakespeare too partook of these ideas as he belonged to this world of the late sixteenth century infused with socio-economic changes and humanist ideals. As V.G. Kiernan states, "Shakespeare was in search of fresh and living, instead of fossilized, connections. His quest was part of the all-round emancipation of the individual that was unfolding" (Kettle 50). Towards the latter part of the sixteenth century the individual came at the centre of things.

Whereas Elizabeth's rule was a period of stability, it was not without its rebellious forces. Two very famous incidents from this period were the Northern rebellion of 1569 and the Essex rebellion of 1601. In the former, the Catholics felt side-lined in the court and rebelled against Elizabeth favouring Mary Queen of Scots. The Elizabethan Settlement suggested a median between the different faiths but was not acceptable to all. This was followed by other plots to remove Elizabeth. But the next significant uprising was from within the court by the Earl of Essex. The Essex Rebellion was led by the Earl of Essex, Sir Robert Devereux in 1601. After his failure to curb the Irish rebellion he returned and was spurned by Elizabeth. Interestingly, A.L. Morton explains the chief cause of the rebellion of the Earl of Essex differently. The Queen had given him the "monopoly" for the sale of "sweet wine" for ten years. But her refusal to renew it created discontent in him. One of the reasons for this was the rise of a group of people who resisted such monopolization in trade and put forth their own interests (Morton 178). In any case, the "rebel" was a figure who had no position and sanction according to religious discourse. In a Church homily the figure of the rebel is explained thus:

Thus you see that all God's laws are by rebels violated and broken, and that all sins possible to be committed against God or man be contained in rebellion: which sins, if a man list to name by the accustomed names of the seven capital or deadly sins, as pride, envy, wrath, covetousness, sloth, gluttony, and lechery, he shall find them all in rebellion, and amongst rebels. (Abrams, M.H. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: The Sixteenth Century The Early Seventeenth Century*. New York and London: Norton, 2000. 558)

It is therefore no surprise that in 1585, in the light of various attempts on Elizabeth's life, "An Order of Prayer and Thanksgiving for the Preservation of the Queen's Majesty's Life and Safety" was read in the Church of England. It stated, when "a traitorous subject...lay violent hands upon her royal person and to have murdered her. But still the blessed eye of Thy blessed providence did either prevent him by some sudden interruption of his endeavour or, by the majesty of her person and princely behaviour towards him, didst strike him so abashed that he could not perform his conceived bloody purpose" (Stump 343). Through this prayer, the Queen's position is divinely ordained and all rebellion is qualified as evil and as a result quelled in this war between good and evil.

1.4 MACHIAVELLI'S *THE PRINCE* AND JAMES' *BASILIKON DORON*

Niccollo Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1513) focussed on a new discourse of politicking and its working in the state. In it, one can mark the advent of the "usurper," a shift from the king as divinely ordained. Machiavelli raises the question of how a ruler must preserve his power; whether the ruler must employ cruelty to preserve his power or not. Further, should the ruler be feared or loved. The answers to these questions make us aware of the changes setting in the Renaissance period in Italy and its impact in England. Take a look at Machiavelli's writing in *The Prince*:

Hence we may learn the lesson that on seizing a state, the usurper should make haste to inflict what injuries he must, at a stroke, that he may not have to renew them daily, but be enabled by their discontinuance to reassure men's minds, and afterwards win them over by benefits. Whosoever, either through timidity or from following bad counsels, adopts a contrary course, must keep the sword always drawn, and can put no trust in his subjects, who suffering from continued and constantly renewed severities, will never yield him their confidence. (Machiavelli, Nicollo. *The Prince* (1513), Harvard Classics collection. New York: Collier, 1910.33-34)

The Renaissance began in Italy and its focus on the individual in society at the centre of things has interesting manifestations. The idea of individual dignity works in different ways. In the context of the idea of Kingship, mark the attention given to the "usurper". The divine sanctity of the king is challenged by the usurper. Machiavelli, in his treatise, suggests both the method of operation and the sustenance of rule for the usurper. In the context of England, under the vaneer of the divinely elected monarch, one can also sense a challenge to it in the form of contesting claims and political unrest. Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of King Richard II* is an example of these changes in the relation between the monarch and the society. In fact to the question of whether the monarch must be "feared or loved" Machiavelli explains:

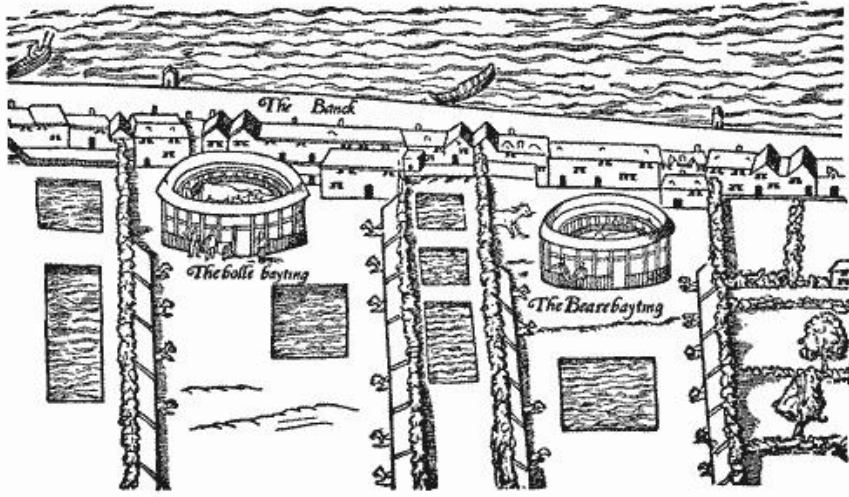
And here comes in the question whether it is better to be loved rather than feared, or feared rather than love. It might perhaps be answered that we should wish to be both; but since love and fear can hardly exist together, if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved. (57-58)

In contrast to a work like Machiavelli's *The Prince* is King James' *Basilikon Doron* (1599). It too delves into ideas about the monarch, 'good' governance and his relationship to his subjects. The title is a "Greek phrase translated as 'kingly gift'." (Nostbakken, Faith. *Understanding Macbeth: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources and Historical Documents*. London: The Greenwood P, 1997. 45). In it King James explains the difference between the "good king and a usurping tyrant." Where the former is answerable to God and is "ordained for his people." The latter considers "his people to be ordained for him." Honour for the good king meant a "due discharge of his calling." But for the tyrant it rested in a realisation of his "ambitious pretences." This was of course in contrast to Machiavelli's ideas. But what is more important to understand is the fact that the idea of a monarch and a 'good' monarch was a contested one. This meant that change was setting in, in the way issues related to monarchy were perceived by the people. The seventeenth century with the execution of Charles I and the establishment of Cromwellian republic is an example of the same. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* written and performed at the beginning of the seventeenth century carries within it the seed of this unrest.

1.5 DRAMA IN THE RENAISSANCE WORLD

1.5.1 Stage in the Elizabethan Period

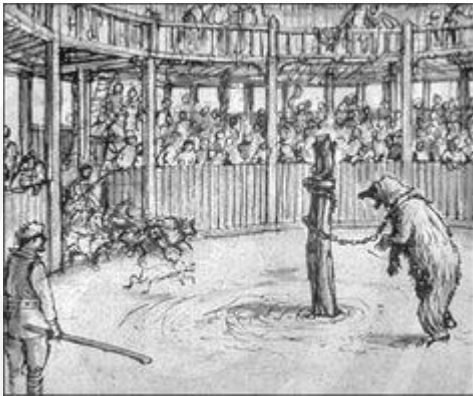
Illustration-1



Bear-baiting rings

(Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/a4/Bear_and_bull-baiting_rings%2C_Bankside%2C_London_c.1560.png)

Illustration-2



(Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/236x/52/a3/63/52a363a79179ffe7988bb4a8e86f4f30--pictures-of-bears-twelfth-night.jpg>)

Illustration-3



(Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/474x/fe/9f/c0/fe9fc042f428db926df8664feb0b0acd--golden-age-pictures-of.jpg>)

Illustration-4



The **Bear Garden** (left) and the Bull Baiting arena (right) as depicted by Visscher's map of 1616. Image courtesy of the Folger Digital Image Collection

Source: (https://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/graphics/visscher_bear_garden.jpg)

Theatre in England evolved significantly in the sixteenth century. Entertainment space in this period took the form of acrobatics and bear-baiting rings, from there it went to the round stage used by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Watching bulls fighting, dogs baiting a bear, performances of acrobats and actors, all, took place and the one in inn yards and other informal structures. (See Illustrations 1, 2 and 3). Such a spectacle tells us how the audience stood close at hand and watched the performers. This interaction was direct, exciting and engaging. The people of Elizabethan England would visit the bear baiting rings and watch these shows with real blood and gore. This was a popular form of sport for the people. It is interesting to mark that the people also went to watch public executions. The structure of the inn yards was quite close to what we see in terms of the later stage developments. As Frye states:

Certainly, some of his early theatrical experience would have been with courtyards of inns..., where the actors would set up their stage at one end and play to an audience collected on the yard and on the balconies. The permanent theatre buildings erected around Elizabethan London after 1576 preserved much of the feeling of these innyards, by their placing of stage, yard and galleries. (Frye No. 19). Plays were also performed at the Inns of Courts. These were "a combination of law schools, professional societies and gentlemen's clubs" (no. 39 Frye, Roland Mushat. *Shakespeare's Life and Times*. London: Faber & Faber, 1967).

Theatre in the Elizabethan period hinged on providing entertainment and a close interaction with the audience. The structure of the inn yard when transformed to the formal stage of Shakespeare's time made space for the gentry and nobility as it did for the commoners who stood in the pit. Shakespeare's formal theatrical association was with Lord Chamberlain's Company. It was patronised by Henry Carey, The Lord Chamberlain, hence the name. The theatre was owned by a group of people and this included Shakespeare. Theatre was a popular form of entertainment and it also had a commercial side to it. The association of money with the world of theatre was important. There were tickets to be bought and sold, people invested in the theatre and also made profits. In this way theatres were rooted in the everyday life.

1.5.2 The Globe theatre

Illustration-5



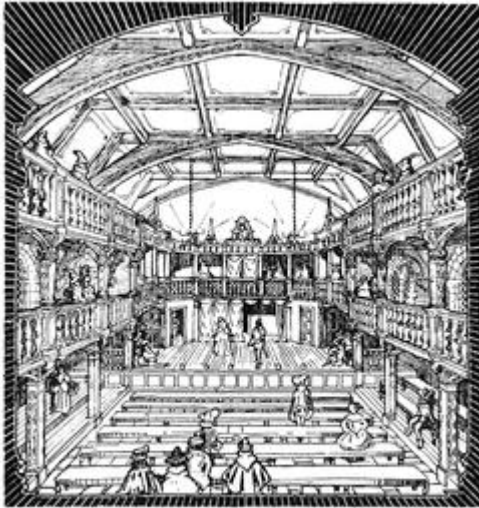
The Swan Playhouse in London. It was sketched by the Dutch scholar Johannes de Witt in 1596. He noticed that the Swan was the largest theatre and had a capacity of 3000. The sketch is a copy de Witt's sketch made by his friend Aernout van Buchell
 (Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/5/51/Swan-theatre-johannes-de-witt-ms-842-f132r-1596.jpg/510px-Swan-theatre-johannes-de-witt-ms-842-f132r-1596.jpg>)

Illustration-6



Second Globe Theatre, detail from Hollar's *View of London*, 1647. Hollar sketched the building from life (see top) but only later assembled the drawings into this *View*; he mislabelled the images of The Globe and the nearby bear-baiting enclosure. Here the correct label has been restored. The small building to the left supplied food and ale-sellers
 (Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/6/6f/Hollar_Long_View_detail.png/220px-Hollar_Long_View_detail.png)

Illustration-7



CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION by G. Topham Forrest

Conjectural reconstruction of the second Blackfriars Theatre from contemporary documents.

(Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/1/1c/Blackfriars_theatre_conjectural_reconstruction_1921.png/250px-Blackfriars_theatre_conjectural_reconstruction_1921.png)

There were many theatres during the period. For instance one of the oldest was Red Lion theatre. Then there was the Theatre, Rose Theatre and Swan Theatre. In 1599 The Globe Theatre was built by Shakespeare and others. It continued till 1613 when it was burnt down. Based on the sketch of the Swan Theatre by the Dutch, Johannes de Witt, we get to know the structure of the stage in that period. The Swan Theatre could accommodate 3000 people. The stage space was surrounded by three tiers of galleries. To sit there one would have to pay extra money. The space in front of the stage was referred to as the pit and had the cheapest tickets. The “groundlings” could stand and watch the play for a nominal amount. There was no roof over that space and they had to brave weather conditions. But the people in the galleries had to pay more and were protected due to the roof. The gallery also had rooms for private viewing called the *tarras*. As we know from the sketch of the Swan theatre, there was a part of the stage that extended into the audience space. This was called the apron stage. A part of this was covered. It provided protection to the actors from the weather and also space to designate parts such as the heaven or even keep some kind of equipment required in the play. There was a trapdoor to indicate hell. (See Illustrations 5 and 6)

The two main groups of performing companies were the Admiral’s Men and Lord Chamberlain’s Men. The former performed in the Rose and the latter in the Theatre. These were located in the areas that also housed the brothels. Later the Lord Chamberlain’s Men performed in the Globe theatre. As King James I came to power as the King of England, the Lord Chamberlain’s Men became the official group and were henceforth called King’s Men. The private theatres such as the Blackfriars theatre was bought by Shakespeare and other partners in 1608. It catered to the elite and could seat only about 200-300 people. (See Illustration 7). It is interesting to therefore mark the use of the theatrical space for a presentation and discussion of issues related to the ways of the world of kings and nobility. The intervention in these spaces by the actors said a lot about the kind of change and unrest setting in society.

1.6 DRAMA AND CENSORSHIP IN ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

Illustration - 8



Claes Visscher's view of London, 1616

(Source: https://cdn2.rsc.org.uk/sitefinity/images/miscellaneous/out_of_copyright_visscher_view_of_lond_on_1616_social-media_1440x1368.tmb-gal-670.jpg?sfvrsn=a5d65821_1)

Theatre, an act of performance has always been seen as a threatening force in society. In the context of Elizabethan England the relation between performance of plays and the monarchy was complex. On the one hand watching plays was a popular pastime for the ordinary people. On the other hand the plays made references to the existing structures of power. This was noted by the monarchy. For instance the immense popularity of *Richard II* disturbed Queen Elizabeth. As William Lambarde records in "His Notes of a Conversation with Queen Elizabeth I about *Richard II*:"

Her Majestie fell upon the reign of King Richard II, saying, "I am Richard II. Know ye not that?...He that will forget God, will also forget his benefactor; this tragedy was played 40 times in open streets and houses. (McDonald, Russ. *Shakespeare: An Introduction with Documents*. Boston: Bedford Books, 1996. 178)

The manifold ways in which theatre and society existed become clear. The gaze of censors was being directed towards the world of theatre and performance. For instance, the day before the uprising by the Earl of Essex a performance of *Richard II* was presented. Also as McDonald points out, "*Richard II*, for example, was originally printed, almost certainly for political reasons, without the section in act 4, scene 1 in which the king is actually deposed" (55). Numerous Acts and statutes were passed to control the kind of plays that were put up.

Spatially, the theatres were located outside the city in the space called the "liberties". By their spatial dislocation from mainstream society, it became a space that contested the structures of power. Amongst many such Acts was that of the *Act of Common Council for the Regulation Of Theatrical performances in London* (December 6, 1574):

. . . for the safety and well ordering of the people there assembled, be it enacted by the authority of the Common Council that from henceforth, no play, comedy, tragedy, interlude nor public show shall be

openly played or showed openly within the Liberties of the City wherein shall be uttered any words, examples, or doings of any unchastity, sedition nor such like unfit and uncomely matter upon pain of imprisonment by the space of fourteen days of all persons offending in any such open playing or showings, and five pounds for every such offense. (Pollard, Tanya. ed. *Shakespeare's Theatre: A Sourcebook*. USA: Blackwell, 2004. 306)

The church represented a powerful space that framed the rules on which society rested and the theatre became an alternative space to contest those normative ideas. In 1597 the Privy Council passed an order against the “disorders” committed in the playhouses, the decree being that no play shall be performed in London city and the playhouses too shall be brought down. Clearly there was a tussle between playhouses and the authorities.

In this milieu there was an active discussion on theatrical performances. What then was the role and function of theatre in society? A staunch critic of theatre, Stephen Gosson wrote *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579). Gosson considered theatre to be immoral in its import and exhorted:

This have I set down of the abuses of poets, pipers, and players, which bring us to pleasure, sloth, sleep, sin, and without repentance to death and the devil...Let us but shut up our ears to poets, pipers and player; pull our feet back from resort to theaters, and turn away our eyes from beholding of vanity; the greatest storm of abuse will be overblown, and a fair path trodden to amendment of life. (Pollard 28)

Gosson suggested a movement away from theatre. Philip Stubbes in *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) saw the performer as the devil's partner. He was uncomfortable with the presentation of the bawdy in plays, especially the use of abuses. John Rainolds in *The Overthrow of Stage-Plays* (1599) condemned the performance of female roles by men. Henry Crosse in *Virtue's Commonwealth* (1603) understood plays to be “scandalous and scurrilous”. The experience of performing and watching plays was subversive at many levels. Apart from the use of the bawdy, the performance of women's roles by men disturbed certain critics as this challenged gender roles and was also seen as women's association with the bawdy. Men cross-dressed as women and performed in ways seen as flouting the norms of social behavior. The fact that these were being watched by women themselves upset the social fabric and its guidelines of prescriptive behaviour for women.

However watching plays had struck a chord with people in a manner that was not easy to separate. Hence, there were others like Thomas Lodge who wrote *A Reply to Stephen Gosson's School of Abuse, in Defence of Poetry, Music and Stage Plays* (1579) as a response to Gosson's virulent attack on theatres:

First therefore, if it be not tedious to Gosson to hearken to the learned, the reader shall perceive the antiquity of playmaking, the inventors of comedies, and therewithall the use and commodity of them. So that in the end I hope my labor shall be liked, and the learned will sooner conceive his folly. (Pollard 51)

Thomas Heywood's *An Apology for Actors* (1611) looked at “playing as an ornament of the city.” These conflicting views indicate that one of the most popular forms of entertainment, rooted in society was seen by many as subversive. The debates and arguments around it continued. The Puritan influence and a conservativeness that sought to hold this free flow of ideas culminated in the shutting down of theatres in 1642.

Playwriting and watching disturbed the monarchy and this led to the passing of Acts and Decrees that tried to control and censor plays. The actor for all his commercial profit-making was equated with vagabonds. In 1572, the *Act For The Punishment Of Vagabonds, And For The Relief Of The Poor And Impotent* was passed and brought back in 1604. The Act stated that “fencers, bear-wards, common players of interludes, and minstrels wandering abroad” were to be “adjudged, and deemed as rogues, and vagabonds” and punished accordingly. In another act, *An Act To Restrain Abuses Of Players*, (1606)

stated that if any person committed profanity against God or his name he shall have to pay ten pounds for every such offense.

Theatres were also the first to be shut down due to the repeated onset of plague in England. John Stow in *Survey of London* records that “between December 1592 and the following December, 11,000 people in London out of approximately 200,000 died owing to the plague” (Baker, William. *William Shakespeare*. London: Continuum, 2009. 15). Peter Thomson too points out in “Playhouses and Players in the time of Shakespeare” that, “It became an established custom to order the closing of the London theatres when registered deaths reached forty in any one week.” Germaine Greer too corroborates this idea:

The playhouses were known to be unhealthy places, which is why they were the first institutions to be closed down in times of plague; they were also the only places where also the denizens of London, from the meanest pickpocket to the grandest functionary, could foregather and experience their membership of a community. Even the largest churches did not afford the same spectacular possibilities, for the pulpit was raised above the congregation who stood all on one plane. In the theatre the audience could see itself as a tapestry of faces, surging below in the pit and rising on the tiers around the wooden walls, with the actor on his promontory, the projecting stage, at their mercy. (Greer, Germaine. *Shakespeare: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford, 1986. 24)

Theatres, play-going and performance was central to Elizabethan life. Watching a performance was a social act binding the people and the world of stage in complex ways. An intermingling of different social groups, of men and women had a bearing on the plays written, performed and discussed.

1.7 DATE OF THE PLAY

William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is believed to have been written around 1606. This was the period after the accession of King James I to the English throne. He was King James VI of Scotland and became the first Scottish king to become the monarch of England. His rise was not without opposition and as a result rebellion against the king followed. One such opposition was the failed rebellion of the Gunpowder Plot. This plot points towards the murky aspects that surrounded monarchy in those days. *Macbeth* captures the tensions and contradictions that belong to the Jacobean age.

Though there is no clear evidence regarding the dating of the play, scholars pitch for a date between 1599 and 1606. This is based on William Warner’s poem *A Continuance of Albion’s England* (1586) that mentions *Makbeth* as:

One *Makebeth*, who had traitorously his sometimes Souereigne slaine,
And like a Monster not a Man vsurpt in *Scotland* raigne

Some years later, in 1605 a Latin playlet, Dr. Gwin’s *Tres Sibyllae* was written and performed for King James in Oxford on August 27, 1605. The title translated as “Three Sibyls” praised the King and recognised his royal connection to Banquo and established him as King of England and Scotland (Nostbakken 29). The greetings of the three sibyls to King James in *Tres Sibyllae* are as follows: “Hail thou who rulest Scotland/Hail thou who rulest England/Hail thou who rulest Ireland/Hail thou to whom France gives titles whilst the others give lands/Hail thou whom Britain, now united though formerly divided, cherishes/Hail thou supreme British, Irish, Gallic Monarch” (Nostbakken, Faith. *Understanding Macbeth: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources and Historical Documents*. London: The Greenwood P, 1997. 30). These are echoed in the witches’ predictions to Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play.

The performance of the play was confirmed in an eye-witness account, by the English astrologist Simon Forman of the play’s public performance. Forman records in *Book of Plaies* how the play was performed on April 20, 1611 at the Globe. He states:

In Mackbeth at the Glob, 1610, the 20 of April [Sat], there was to be obserued, firste, how Mackbeth

and Bancko, 2 noble men of Scotland, Ridinge thorowe a wood, the[r] stode before them 3 women feiries or Nymphes, And saluted Mackbeth, saying 3 tymes vnto him, haille Mackbeth, King of Codon; (Bloom, Harold. Ed. *Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages: Macbeth*. New York, Infobase P, 2008. 44)

Forman's record of the play is primarily a summary and it differs from the Folio account of the play in 1623. But it pins the play to a plausible date.

Keeping in mind Warner's poem and Forman's account of the performance most take 1606 to be the year in which it was written. There is evidence that the play was also performed at the King's court. As Nostbakken states, "The Scottish historical setting, the Banquo legend, the inclusion of witches, and the debate about kinship all reflect personal interests of King James, indicating that Shakespeare may have had a court performance in mind" (121).

1.8 SOURCES OF *MACBETH*

This section will provide a brief overview of the source texts used by Shakespeare for *Macbeth*. A brief look at different historical accounts that find reference in the play provides a layered complexity to the play. It functions dialectically with texts that suggest a formative base to the Shakespearean text. These interact with other documents and texts of the world of the play. We also read it in the twenty-first century context and the stance creates another level of interpretation interacting both with the formative texts and the play, text.

Amongst the possible sources, it is believed that *Macbeth* is based on Raphael Holinshed's *The Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1577). Other historical documents that work their way into the play are John Major's *A History of Greater Britain* (1521) and George Buchanan's *History of Scotland* (1582). (See Illustration-9). Most researchers have pointed out that Shakespeare relied primarily on Holinshed's *Chronicles* but that he was possibly aware of other historical accounts too. We can, therefore, state that the primary source of *Macbeth* was Holinshed's *Chronicles*.

Illustration-9



The first edition of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Irelande*, printed in 1587. (Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/b/bd/1577_printing_of_Holinshed%27s_Chronicles.jpg/220px-1577_printing_of_Holinshed%27s_Chronicles.jpg)

Historically, Macbeth was the eighty-fifth king of Scotland who ruled from 1040 to 1057 C.E. He killed his predecessor, King Duncan and was succeeded by the latter's son, Malcolm III. In the sixteenth century, the ascent of the Scottish king to the English throne prompted interest in the dynamic between the two nations. The reconstruction of Macbeth in historical documents places him at the cross-section of the cultural and political history of the two countries as they are conjoined in the rule of King James I. Let us examine the depiction of Macbeth in the possible sources chronologically. John Major's historical account of "Greater Britain", presents Macbeth as follows:

This Duncan was secretly put to death by the faction which had till then been in opposition. He was mortally wounded by one Macbeth at Lochgowane, and was then carried to Elgin, where he died...Machabeus, or Macbeth as some speak it, when Duncan had been thus betrayed to his end, assumed the sceptre of sovereignty, usurper fashion, to himself, and would have pursued the sons of dead Duncan to their destruction. (Carroll, William C. *Macbeth: Texts and Contexts*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.126)

The above extract from Major's *A History of Greater Britain* (1521) draws attention to two antagonistic factions. One is of Duncan, or ruler by inheritance and the other is Macbeth or the usurper. Is monarchy a matter of inheritance or can the king be displaced by deception and murder? The "usurper" as new king is certainly Machiavellian and necessitates interpretation. Interestingly, Major's *History* makes no mention of either Lady Macbeth or the witches.

George Buchanan's *History of Scotland* (1582), describes Macbeth as a man of "sharp wit, and of a very lofty spirit; and, if moderation had accompanied it, he had been worthy of a command, though an eminent one" (Carroll, William C. *Macbeth: Texts and Contexts*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. 128). He is presented as brave and one capable of dealing with rebels in a manner that is called "severe"—"But, in punishing offenders, he was so severe, that having no respect to the laws, he seemed soon likely to degenerate into cruelty" (128). His severity is evidenced by his cutting off of Macduald's head. However, Duncan is seen by Macbeth as the slothful cousin. Macbeth meets the witches in a dream. They salute him as Thane of Angus, Thane of Murray and finally king of Scotland. He is also "spurred on" by his wife who "was privy to all his counsels" (130). Buchanan's account mentions seventeen years of Macbeth's rule in which ten years were peaceful as he punished the "free-booters or thieves, who had taken courage from the lenity of Duncan...The public peace being thus restored, he applied his mind to make laws" (Carroll 131). However, as his kingly ascent was "obtained by violence" he became insecure and his anxieties egg him on to greater violence as he kills Banquo. He is succeeded by Malcolm III as the eighty-sixth king.

The primary source of *Macbeth* was Holinshed's *Chronicles* that relied on John Bellenden's Scottish translation of Hector Boece's Latin history. Holinshed's *Chronicles* presents Duncan and Macbeth as born to the two daughters of Malcolm; Duncan to Beatrice and Macbeth to Doada. The *Chronicles* describes Macbeth as a "valiant gentleman, and one that if he had not been somewhat cruel of nature, might have been thought most worthy the government of a realm" (Carroll, William C. *Macbeth: Texts and Contexts*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. 135). On the other hand Duncan has been described as of a very mild temperament, "soft and gentle of nature". Close to Buchanan's account that mentions the ten years of Macbeth's rule is Holinshed's that describes Duncan's reign as "quiet and peaceable, without any notable trouble; but after it was perceived how negligent he was in punishing offenders, many misruled persons took occasion thereof to trouble the peace and quiet state of the commonwealth, by seditious commotions which first had their beginning in this wise" (Carroll 135). This is reversed when Macbeth becomes King as he, "set his whole intention to maintain justice, and to punish all enormities and abuses" (Carroll 144). He is described as the "sure defense and buckler" of the innocent people. Holinshed accounts ten peaceful years of a reign of seventeen years as the latter part of Macbeth's rule is a period of violence and anarchy. This difference in the governance of the two kings or the period of Macbeth's rule is glossed over by Shakespeare.

In Holinshed's version (as also in Buchanan), the Stuart line descends from Banquo in keeping with the witches' prediction. Macdonwald is the rebel who managed to persuade people to join him. From Ireland came the "kerns and gallowglasses" in the hope of spoil (Carroll 137). Macbeth's fight against Macdonwald is a kind of rebellion itself. He contradicts Duncan, accusing him of "slackness" and demands that he and Banquo be allowed to fight Macdonwald. However, unlike the play in which Macbeth 'unseams' the enemy from the navel to the chops, in the *Chronicles*, Macdonwald first kills his wife and children and then himself; his head is sent to Duncan and the body is then put up on the staves by Macbeth—"Macbeth entering into the castle by the gates, as then set open, found the carcass of Macdonwald lying dead there amongst the residue of the slain bodies, which when he beheld, remitting no piece of his cruel nature with that pitiful sight, he caused the head to be cut-off, and set upon a pole's end, and so sent it as a present to the King who as then lay at Bertha" (Carroll 137). Meanwhile, in the fight against the Danes, Duncan was losing face. The Scots mixed the juice of mekilwoort berries with poison and sent it with victuals to the enemy; after this Macbeth and Banquo killed them all. In this historical version Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches—"It fortun'd as Macbeth and Banquo journeyed towards Forres, where the King then lay...when suddenly in the midst of a laund, there met them three women in strange and wild apparel, resembling creatures of elder world..." One by one, they refer to him as "Thane of Glamis", "Thane of Cawdor" and finally "King of Scotland" (142). When asked by Banquo they reveal his fate as better because Macbeth "shall reign in deed, but with an unlucky end; neither shall he leave any issue behind..." (Carroll 142). There is also mention of Lady Macbeth as one who was "ambitious, burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of a queen" and compelled Macbeth to kill Duncan. Here too Macbeth rules for ten years but gradually his insecurity caused him to "put his nobles to death".

In converting the available historical material into a text to be performed on stage, Shakespeare uses the sources meaningfully. At a time when the matter of succession and sovereignty had gripped the minds of the people, a play such as *Macbeth* would have functioned in complex ways to problematise these issues. The play negotiates between a new King in England, his Scottish connection, the legacy of the Queen and the percolation of these factors to the imagination of the people. The rebellions against the monarch such as the Gunpowder Plot resonate in the play along with the established claims of inheritance and power. A play written and performed in the early years of the reign of King James I would certainly have been read, watched and understood on these counts.

Set in Scottish terrain, *Macbeth* makes explicit, divergent and conflicting voices in the form of Macbeth's aspirations for the kingly crown as against the projected legitimate claims of Malcolm through the system of primogeniture. In doing so, the play problematizes the insecurities and tentativeness brewing amongst the people during James' rule. The contradictions of King James' rule soon transform into the tumult of the reign of Charles I. The events of the 1640s challenged the lineal descent of monarchs. In writing *Macbeth* Shakespeare presents a complex amalgam of issues that are tentative and lasting at the same time.

1.9 LET US SUM UP

This chapter introduced you to the England of the sixteenth century and particularly the humanist thought. It acquainted you with monarchical debates in the form of Machiavellian strategy and King James' *Basilikon Doron* with help from this unit. You will be able to visualise the social world of London and its theatre going audience. A brief history of the stage with special reference to the Globe theatre draws attention to the experience of watching a play in the Elizabethan times. The section on drama and censorship reveals how many a feather were ruffled by the plays with reference to the monarchical issues of the time. Finally you would have understood the historical rootedness of the play in terms of the different sources that Shakespeare was familiar with and thus relied on for the subject of his play.

1.10 GLOSSARY

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Baiting: | In this case to provoke the bear |
| Copernicus: | He challenged the Ptolemaic system in the sixteenth century by proposing the heliocentric model with the sun at the centre and the earth and other planets moving around it. |
| Elizabethan Settlement: | When Elizabeth became the queen of England she had to confront many problems, one of them being the Catholic response to her Protestant leanings. She finally proposed the Elizabethan settlement and the Anglican faith that allowed people to practice their Catholic belief by accepting the Queen as sovereign. |
| Humanism: | A term associated with the Renaissance. A revival of classical learning shifted the focus on to the human and its refinement. |
| Protestant: | It is a form of Christianity. People who were dissatisfied with the Catholic tenets of Christianity, especially papal supremacy constituted the Protestant group. |
| Ptolmey: | An astronomer who in 150 AD proposed the geocentric model of the system—earth at the centre and all other planets going around it. |
| Renaissance: | The French word literally means awakening. It refers to a movement that started in the fourteenth century in Italy, gained prominence in the fifteenth century and spread to other parts of Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. |
| Spanish Armada: | It was a fleet of ships that invaded England in 1588 |

1.11 QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on Renaissance and humanist thought.
2. Describe the world of drama in the sixteenth century.
3. Write a note on the issue of censorship in theatres in the sixteenth century.
4. Discuss the issue of the date assigned to the writing of *Macbeth*.
5. What are the different sources on which Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is based? Explain.
6. Write a note on the *Chronicles* as the primary source to *Macbeth*.
7. Study *Macbeth*'s character as an instance of Machiavellian strategy.

1.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

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UNIT 2 *MACBETH: PART-I*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Act I
- 2.3 Act II
- 2.4 Let us sum up
- 2.5 Glossary
- 2.6 Questions
- 2.7 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will acquaint you with William Shakespeare’s tragedy, *Macbeth*. The play is one of the most widely discussed and oft performed ones. This unit will discuss the important issues raised in Acts I and II of the play. It will also draw attention to the different social spaces outlined in the play—from the court to the heath and Macbeth’s home. The soliloquies of Macbeth will be analysed in detail in this unit.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is a tragedy. It is believed to have been written around 1606. This is a year after the failure of the Gunpowder Plot against the King. As discussed in the previous unit, the play is based primarily on Raphael Holinshed’s *The Chronicles of England Scotland and Ireland* (1587). Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* explores the issues of kingship against the changing political landscape of England; the transition from Elizabeth’s reign to that of the Scottish King James VI who became King James I of England. The uncertainty of the political context as well as a changing social structure finds expression in Shakespeare’s plays. During this period Shakespeare wrote other famous tragedies such as *Othello* (1603-4) and *King Lear* (1605-6).

2.2 ACT I

The play is written by an English playwright but is situated in Scotland, not England. We must keep in mind the parallel between the Scottish claim for kingship and its relevance to the political climate of England. The play begins on an ominous note with thunder and lightning. These signal the advent of the witches in an open place. A play that deals with the world of kings and queens begins within a social space that is beyond the purview of normative society. This is the supernatural world of the witches. Instead of the Scottish court we see the witches in an “open space”. The first scene draws attention towards a battle that is both “lost” and “won”. It presents a kind of ambiguity that develops into equivocation; a recurrent theme in the play. The presence of familiars like “Graymalkin” and “Paddock” give an eerie beginning to the play with the constant refrain:

“Fair is foul, and foul is fair:
Hover through the fog and filthy air” (1.1. 11-12)

In this first scene, the witches make their intentions clear—they plan to meet Macbeth on the heath. The second scene presents King Duncan and details about a certain battle are presented to him. There is reference to a rebellion countered by Duncan’s forces—an invasion from forces both inside and outside the country. From within Scotland an uprising has been initiated by Macdonwald. From outside Scotland, there are the Norwegian forces to be countered. The captain, who has returned from the field as a “bloody man” is asked to report to the King. His narrative introduces Macbeth as a “brave character”. The context of the war and rebellion are also provided to the reader/viewer. We are given to imagine the bravery and

power wielded by Macbeth who possesses the ability to counter both these uprisings. The hurly-burly of Scene I is presented in the form of a rebellion in Scene II.

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
Which smok'd with bloody execution,
Like Valour's minion, carv'd out his passage,
Till he fac'd the slave;
Which he ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops,
And fix'd his head upon our battlements. (1.2. 16-23)

One must mark the nature of rebellion. In these lines one can see the adulation of the Captain for the "brave" Macbeth. Physical bravery and violence is glorified to reinstate kingly power. Killing is valorised and sanctioned by the Scottish state as it is employed for its defence. The Captain compares Macbeth's valour to the wounds inflicted at "Golgotha", the place of Christ's crucifixion. As the Captain faints due to his wounds, the nobleman Rosse enters the scene to inform the King that the Norwegian powers had been fighting valiantly. But Macbeth, referred to as "Bellona's bridegroom", provides "Point against point, rebellious arm 'gainst arm". This leads to the victory of the Scottish forces.

The first Act establishes the play not just as a tragedy but a sharply political one in which the methodology used by the state to establish and sustain itself is presented. Duncan's final statement in this scene, "What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won" gives the sense that more is to follow. Has Macbeth only won the battle instead of Macdonwald or has he somehow stepped into his place and will soon be able to execute a rebellion that the Thane of Cawdor could not achieve?

The third scene is again situated in the heath where the witches meet. This alternation of scenes provides two different worlds. In one the entities that exist outside the margins of society are presented. In the other, the dominant powers that occupy centre stage are presented. In both cases there seem to be ripples of disturbance that destroy and question the sense of normalcy. In fact peace is nowhere in sight, and if so it is only fleetingly present.

The scene begins once again on an ominous note. The witches' scenes and the space in which they meet to plot and prophesy is presented in an eerie manner. They recount how they played truant with a sailor who had gone to Aleppo. This reference is important as Aleppo was an important trading city in Syria. Like the many people who sought the sea route to trade and make money, the sailor too goes to Aleppo to realise his dreams of making money. Take a look at these prophetic lines, "Sleep shall neither night nor day/ Hang upon his penthouse lid:/ He shall live a man forbid" (1.3 19-21). The witches' conversation indicates that the sailor will no longer be able to rest peacefully. These lines predict the course of events to follow. The pathetic condition of the ambitious sailor who has left for Aleppo to make money is symptomatic of what is soon going to happen to Macbeth. It is interesting to mark two important changes emerging from two different spatial zones. In court, Macbeth has acquired the title of Thane of Cawdor and will soon step into the rebel's place. In their space, the witches' too want to play "truant" and soon enough Macbeth will be like the sailor who travelled to Aleppo with dreams of acquiring wealth and power but was eventually left bereft of sleep. The sailor's "bark" might not be lost but will surely be "tempest-tost". Similarly the reference to the "pilot's thumb" is an indication that the witches have had fun at the expense of the pilot. It is interesting to mark that the witches attack both the sailor and the pilot, people who move outwards to journey for mercenary purposes. In a sense they are people who pursue their ambition. Macbeth too will seek his heart's yearning for power and pursue "vaulting ambition". The witches cast a spell:

Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice again to make up nine
Peace!—the charm's wound up. (1.3. 35-37)

In this scene the two worlds—of the witches and the nobility come together. On their way back from the war, Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches on the heath. The spell has already been cast. The two men see them as strange creatures. They look like old women even as they sport a beard. Banquo asks,

What are these,
So wither'd and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth,
And yet are on't? (1.3. 39-42)

The duo finds it difficult to rationalise the witches in human form. Macbeth urges them to speak and they refer to him as:

All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!
All hail, Macbeth! hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!
All hail, Macbeth! thou shalt be king hereafter! (1.3. 48-50)

These prophecies are indeed “fantastical”. They voice Macbeth’s as yet concealed desire to be the King of Scotland. Banquo too is predicted to be “Lesser than Macbeth and greater” (1.3 66-68). The witches’ predictions create an alternative structure as Macbeth and Banquo wonder at how these can be realised. Macbeth’s bewilderment is well captured in the following lines:

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. (1.3. 70-78)

Macbeth’s curiosity has been stirred. He wonders as to his proposed rapid ascent to the top. In a system of primogeniture it is the King’s eldest son who inherits the throne. The plausibility of Macbeth becoming King is therefore remote as Duncan is succeeded by Malcolm and Donalbain. The realisation of this prophesy seems quite impossible. In the next part of this scene, a part of the witches’ prophesy is realised, as Macbeth is made the Thane of Cawdor. This reward is an acceptance and ratification of the gruesome violence perpetrated by Macbeth on the battlefield. Mark how violence is being celebrated as it is used to defend the Scottish state. Macbeth has created “strange images of death” that have won him the title of the Thane of Cawdor. His fierceness and bravery is enmeshed in a masculine aggression that finds no equal at this juncture. However, he has inherited the title from one who was a rebel. Macbeth is perplexed at this new position. Angus, a nobleman, clarifies,

Who was the Thane, lives yet;
But under heavy judgement bears that life
Which he deserves to lose. Whether he was combin'd
With those of Norway, or did line the rebel
With hidden help and vantage, or that with both
He labour'd in his country's wrack, I know not;
But treasons capital, confess'd and prov'd,
Have overthrown him. (1.3. 109-116)

It is clear from the above lines that any energy channelized against the state is to be curbed. Macbeth in defeating the rebel has earned the title of the Thane of Cawdor. State politik works towards the

reinforcement of the dominant powers as vested in the king. The monarchical powers hold ground. Macbeth is disturbed by the predictions of the witches. But, on the other hand, when asked about the witches' prophecies, Banquo gives a very balanced answer—"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 consequences" (1.3. 123-125). Faith in the monarchical organization that privileges inheritance through birth leads Banquo to believe that the dark powers [witches] might win them over with "honest trifles". He deploys a more balanced and rational approach rooted in the existing social framework. However Macbeth who nurtures these secret ambitions, ponders over the goings on:

Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.—I thank you, gentlemen.—
[*Aside.*] This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good: —
If ill, why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:
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? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man,
That function is smother'd in surmise,
And nothing is, but what is not. (1.3 128-142)

The witches' predictions have been realised to some degree. Macbeth was Thane of Glamis and has now become the Thane of Cawdor. These are the "two truths" that move towards the "imperial theme". He is indeed tempted to neutralise it as neither good nor bad. It has brought success to Macbeth without any use of violence. He believes if "chance" has given him this title it will crown him king. However Macbeth is cognizant of the fact that the final prediction cannot come through without bloodshed and this creates disturbing images. The scene also brings in the idea of equivocation. For instance, "Cannot be ill, cannot be good" or "And nothing is, but what is not" introduces the idea of equivocation. In a world governed by rigid rules and regulations the idea of equivocation introduces a rupture. This break/ rupture indicates that whatever was held to be true can be otherwise and vice versa. Therefore the subject's allegiance towards the King becomes weak. The possibilities are manifold. Whether it is his heart's innermost desire or the witches' prophecy, Macbeth begins to head in the direction of realising the final prophesy of the witches—"If chance will have me King, why, Chance may crown me,/ Without my stir" (1.3. 144). Macbeth dispenses with these troublesome thoughts leaving all to "chance" and tells Banquo that they must speak freely to each other.

Meanwhile, Duncan questions the nobles on the execution of Cawdor. It draws attention to the punishment meted out to traitors in those days. Malcolm's reporting of Cawdor's execution shows him as one who was repentant. His rebellion and consequent defeat and execution becomes a point of reference as we know that Macbeth too might be headed the same way. Macbeth has now taken Cawdor's place and in a sense the events that are to follow are already being predicted. As Duncan says,

There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face:
He was a gentlemen on whom I built
An absolute trust— (1.4 11-13)

Duncan refers to Macbeth as "worthiest cousin" and praises him for his loyalty. This confounds the reader as one wonders if Macbeth has any valid claim to the throne. Ostensibly the bond between Duncan and

Macbeth is feudal as king towards his subject. It is bound by “service and loyalty”. But Shakespeare’s focus draws attention to a fast changing world in which feudal bonds were gradually giving way to a world driven by competition. The flip side of loyalty was treason and it did not take very long for either Cawdor or Macbeth to follow the path. In professing loyalty to the king, even if momentarily, Macbeth reinforces the idea of the divine right of kingship. According to this the king is divinely ordained and all owe allegiance to the monarch. In early seventeenth century, as the rule of the Queen had given way to the control of King James I in England, there was a conflict of allegiances. Will the English subject pay the same kind of obeisance to its new King as it did to the Queen during her reign? These were turbulent times as Queen Elizabeth’s reign was marked by the famous Earl of Essex rebellion just as King Jame’s rule that was witness to the Gunpowder Plot. It appeared as if rebellion had become the norm. The play points towards a world fast changing and the traditional footholds were giving way to a more mercantile disposition marked by competitiveness.

These conflicts are effectively summarised in this scene where the play on loyalty and treason takes place. The idea of nurture and growth that Duncan brings in is no longer a viable one. As Duncan names his eldest as the Prince of Cumberland, one who will become the King after him, conflict ensues. As the witches’ prophesy is belied, Macbeth wonders and thinks to himself in an aside:

(Aside) The Prince of Cumberland!—That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o’erleap,
For in my way it lies. 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.
(1.4 46-53)

The aside well explains Macbeth’s psychological predicament. He knows that Duncan has declared his son as the heir. Yet Macbeth nurtures ambition; he is the brave one. The witches’ prophecies have been partially fulfilled. And he wonders why they can’t be realised completely. Macbeth’s thoughts express his understanding of the dangers that beset him in this endeavour. Such thoughts impede his path and make his desire appear unnatural.

In the next scene Lady Macbeth enters reading a letter sent to her by Macbeth, about his meeting with the weird sisters. It mentions prophecies by these weird creatures who soon vanished into thin air. He tells Lady Macbeth, “This have I thought good to deliver thee (my dearest partner of greatness) that thou might’st not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what greatness is promis’d thee” (1.5. 10-13). She assesses the letter and is circumspect about Macbeth’s essential character. Lady Macbeth finds him too full of the “milk of human kindness”. According to her, Macbeth has the ambition but not the “illness” that should attend it. She takes it upon herself to work towards making real the witches’ prophesy. She says:

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,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown’d withal. (1.5.25-29)

Lady Macbeth decides to lead and show the way. In this game of power, Lady Macbeth’s access to the throne can only be through her husband and she decides to realise his ambition by making it her own. The active role and support provided by Lady Macbeth has led to varied interpretations of her character by critics. She has been considered an ally of the witches. Mark the use of the supernatural in these lines—“pour my spirits in thine ear” or the “valour of my tongue”. Such phraseology connects her to the supernatural world of the witches. It seems as if she has access to a totally different world where the rule

of order does not prevail. There is also speculation about her as being another aspect of Macbeth's personality. She is willing to be the poison that will lead Macbeth to the "golden round". Lady Macbeth's belief that some sort of "metaphysical aid" has decided that Macbeth be crowned reaffirms her faith in Macbeth's ambition and her own. In this fulfilment of ambition Lady Macbeth sheds her 'natural' appearance. She says:

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 th' access and passage to remorse;
That no compunctious 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 murth'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on Nature's mischief! Come, thick Night,
And pall thee in the dunnest 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!' (1.5 40-53)

This is one of the most oft-quoted speeches of Lady Macbeth as she renounces her feminine qualities. Lady Macbeth's demand to be 'unsexed' is taken to be an instance of her proximity to the world of the witches. She demands the milk in her breasts be turned to poison. She calls upon the "murth'ring ministers" to act on her and give the strength to make true the witches' prophesy. Femininity, as part of the patriarchal system is the cornerstone of the feudal world. As loyalties towards the king gradually crumble, the femininity needed to support feudal values also falls apart. A new order seems to be at work and would therefore be seen as unnatural. The deed has to be executed in the dark, at night—"Heaven" itself must not peep. Lady Macbeth's reference to "every point twice done, and then done double" echoes the witches' "Double, double toil and trouble".

The tension between the different worlds of the kings and the witches is poignantly created. The former is a feudal world where order based on the premise of loyalty and honour prevails and the other is marked by disorder and anarchy. The latter disturbs and ruptures the premises of order. In this sense Lady Macbeth belongs to the world of disorder and brings it in to disturb the entrenched loyalties towards the King. She tells him, "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" (1.5. 63-66). A woman who leaves no stone unturned to see her husband wear the kingly crown poses a challenge. We shall take up these aspects of Lady Macbeth's character for discussion in Unit-IV.

As Macbeth enters, in this scene, it is as if the stage has been set for Duncan's murder. Lady Macbeth takes charge of the situation personally and decides to execute the killing. She is certain of the act of murder, even as, Macbeth seems unsure of himself. Take a look at these lines. In his soliloquy, Macbeth states:

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: If th'assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success; that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all—here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. —But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach

Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
 To plague th' inventor: this even-handed justice
 Commends the ingredience of our poison'd chalice
 To our own lips. He's here in double trust:
 First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
 Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
 Who should against his murderer shut the door,
 Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
 Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
 So clear in his great office, that his virtues
 Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against
 The deep damnation of his taking-off;
 And Pity, like a naked new-born babe,
 Striding the blast, or heaven's Cherubins, hors'd
 Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
 Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
 That tears shall drown the wind.—I have no spur
 To prick the sides of my intent, but only
 Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
 And falls on th' other—

(1.7. 1-26)

Macbeth's soliloquy expresses his state of mind. He is beset with confusion and finds it difficult to sort out his thoughts. He reasons with himself and weighs the odds. Macbeth senses the enormity of the act. He understands that in becoming king he will have to flout the feudal order as he is in the position of the "kinsman", "subject", and "host" and is bound to the king. These relationships demand allegiance. As the king is supposed to be divinely ordained the position of the subject is one of subservience. In this soliloquy, Macbeth also points towards the king's virtuous nature. Any attack on this virtuous king will evince a reaction equally horrific. He realises, it is only "vaulting ambition" that pushes him forward towards this dreadful deed. Macbeth becomes the site on which the clash between the two discourses can be seen—the feudal monarchical and the Machiavellian usurper.

In the above quoted speech, the dominant monarchical discourse, prevails leading Macbeth to stall any such act. Lady Macbeth condemns this change in action. She goads him to take on this task and carve out his future. She calls him a "coward" and applauds her own mettle—"I have given suck, and know/ How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:/ I would while it was smiling in my face,/ Have pluck'd the nipple from his boneless gums,/ And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn/ As you had done to this" (1.7. 55-59). Lady Macbeth evokes a violent and gruesome image. In this moment she has given up her role as a woman.

Macbeth's vacillation and Lady Macbeth's firm stance draws attention to the beginnings of a new world in which self-interest is going to be the norm. But this is also a world that gives a chance to people who are otherwise not entitled to the same. In keeping with this spirit, Macbeth applauds Lady Macbeth and tells her to bring forth "male-children" only.

2.3 ACT II

The second act begins with Banquo and Fleance who are soon joined by Macbeth. The stage has been set for the murder which will fully realise the witches' prophesies. But the weird sisters had also made a prediction for Banquo, that his children will wear the crown. In contrast to Macbeth, Banquo is clear about his allegiances and is not driven by the predictive charms of the witches. Macbeth continues to imagine and hallucinate in his famous soliloquy, "Is this a dagger...". The soliloquy is as follows:

Is this a dagger, which I see before me,
 The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee:--
 I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
 Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
 To feeling, as to sight? or art thou but
 A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
 Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
 I see thee yet, in form as palpable
 As this which now I draw.
 Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;
 And such an instrument I was to use.—
 Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,
 Or else worth all the rest: I see thee still;
 And on thy blade, and dudgeon, gouts of blood,
 Which was not so before.—There's no such thing.
 It is the bloody business which informs
 Thus to mine eyes.—Now o'er the one half-world
 Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
 The curtain'd sleep: Witchcraft celebrates
 Pale Hecate's off'rings; and wither'd Murther,
 Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
 Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.
 With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
 Moves like a ghost.—Thou sure and firm-set earth,
 Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
 Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,
 And take the present horror from the time,
 Which now suits with it.—Whiles I threat, he lives:
 Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

[A bell rings]

I go, and it is done: the bell invites me.
 Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
 That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell.

(2.1. 33-64)

In this soliloquy Macbeth is hallucinating. Having been through a series of doubts and uncertainties, Macbeth visualises the instrument required to execute the deed, the dagger. Its exact position, "handle towards my hand" has been clearly described. This indicates both the temptation and his willingness to succumb to it. He wonders if it is a real dagger or a figment of his imagination. Macbeth's hallucinations bring him a step closer to the execution of the act. The reference to the unreality of the act, described as "bloody business" prepares the reader/ viewer for what is to follow. The act in imagination is ratified by bringing in Hecate's world. This soliloquy also seals his intentions and expresses the finality of the act—"Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell/ That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell".

The next scene begins with signals that presage the "unnatural" nature of the murder about to be committed. Lady Macbeth prepares for the act as she drugs the grooms and keeps their "daggers ready". But at the moment the deed is to be executed, she is unable to commit the gory act and says, "Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done't.—My husband!"(2.2. 12-13). It is Macbeth who murders the king. Having committed the act, his inability to say 'Amen' indicates his loss of sanity. He hears a voice saying, "Sleep no more! Macbeth does murther Sleep,—the innocent Sleep." One is reminded of the Captain who can sleep no more. Each successive moment reveals Macbeth's psychological schism as he is unable to deal with the enormity of the act committed by him. He continues to hear voices, "'Glamis hath murther'd Sleep, and therefore Cawdor/ shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!" The

magnitude of the murder must be placed in the context of feudal loyalties governed by laws that forbade such crimes and considered them to be against the divine order. We must remember that the king was considered to be divinely ordained so any act that went against the king was therefore considered “unnatural”. Placed in this context, Macbeth is bound to feel disturbed. Like the Thane of Cawdor he too can no longer fit into the structure of existence as he now stands outside of it. Vivid imagery describes these conflicts as Macbeth thinks that “great Neptune’s ocean” will not wash the blood from his hands.

Act II, Scene III is known famously for what is called the Porter scene in the play. It has been considered by critics like S.T. Coleridge to be a later “interpolation of the actors”. On the other hand, Thomas de Quincey focussed on the “knocking at the gate” and its relevance to the play. The Porter scene works at various levels. It provides a suitable interruption to a very tense moment in the play and also reiterates the theme of equivocation in the play. Word-play indicates the layered connotations in this play. Be it Macbeth and the witches prophecies, or Lady Macbeth and Macbeth there is action behind the words. The Porter scene must be analysed in this context.

In keeping with the medieval tradition, the scene offers comic relief. The ‘hell-porter’ was a recognisable figure in the medieval plays. The first character to enter the hell-gate is the farmer—“Here’s a farmer that hang’d/ himself on th’expectation of plenty” (2.3 4). It reflects the tendency of the farmer to hoard grains and wait for a rise in prices, failing which he is ruined. There is a pun on the word farmer as it also refers to the trial of a Jesuit priest, Father Garnet who “went under the name farmer” (Muir, Kenneth. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Methuen, 1984. 59). Mark how the peasant, otherwise the humblest has now taken to hoarding and making money. The next one to enter is the equivocator. Literally speaking, he is a person who does not make meaning clear—“that could swear in both the scales/ against either scale” (2.3 9). This is a reference to the Jesuits. This is also a central theme in the play. The witches’ “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” is an enforcement of the theme of equivocation. The next one to enter is the tailor—“Faith here’s an English tailor/ come hither for stealing out of a French hose” (2.3. 14). There are many ways of interpreting this. Critics have interpreted it variously to mean a joke about the tailors, a sexual innuendo, and reference to urinating or even the disease, syphilis. This scene brings in characters from society who are trying to make money. The tailor, farmer, equivocator try to further their interests. This indicates a society gradually changing. These are people, who as the Porter points out have taken the “primrose way”. In the biblical sense they have taken the easy way. One can mark the beginnings of a new social structure, where like Macbeth, people are driven by self-interest and the profit-motive.

The theme of equivocation is carried further in the Porter’s conversation with Macduff. He tells him that drink provokes, “nose-painting, sleep and urine”. Drink is seen as an “equivocator with lechery”. It “provokes/ the desire, but it takes away the performance” (2.3 28-29).

The nobleman, Lennox draws attention to how the weather was “unruly”—“Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,/ Lamentings heard i’th’ air, strange screams of death” (2.3 55-56). The unruly, anarchic, the unnatural has finally made its way to disturb the order of things. Violence unacceptable to the state has finally made its way. Macduff voices it as he discovers the crime:

Most sacriligious Murther hath broke ope
The Lord’s anointed Temple, and stole thence
The life o’th building! (2.3. 65-67)

The murder is “sacrilegious” and the “Lord’s anointed temple” has been violated. The sight is akin to a “Gorgon” or the female monster in Greek mythology, one that turned any onlooker to stone. To sum up this idea one can state that the divinely sanctioned order has been violated. Macbeth admits to having murdered the grooms. He justifies his act as arising out of his sense of loyalty. Malcolm and Donalbain are quick to realise what has happened and sense that they might soon be implicated and decide to run away. As Donalbain says, “Malcolm to England and Donalbain to Ireland.” In the final scene of the

second act, the exchange between Rosse and the Old man point towards the unnatural nature of the act. The Old Man tells Rosse,

Old Man: 'Tis unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last,
A falcon, towering in her pride of place,
Was by a mousing owl hawk'd at and kill'd.

Rosse: And Duncan's horses (a thing most strange and certain)
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make
War with mankind

Old Man: 'Tis said, they eat each other. (2.4. 10-18)

Things are no longer going to be governed by the norm. It is believed that Duncan's horses ate each other up. The predatory motif has become significant. In this new world the idea of the kill will have to be reconsidered. The image of the falcon and the "mousing owl" inverts hierarchy signalling rule by the usurper. The second act also ends with the investiture of Macbeth as King at Scone and the shifting of the mortal remains of Duncan to Colme-kill.

2.4 LET US SUM UP

In this chapter you have studied Acts I and II of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Act I introduces the idea of rebellion and violence and its contradictory relationship to the kingly powers. Where the first act presents the Thane of Cawdor as a traitor, Macbeth is positioned in Act II as a murderer of the King. This unit on *Macbeth* also draws attention to the different spaces in the play. There is the "Heath" where Macbeth meets the witches. And then there is the space of the court. The first two acts also bring forth Lady Macbeth's character and her renunciation of femininity. She seeks power and dares to challenge order. Act I leads to the finalisation of Macbeth's intention to murder. It is in the second act that the execution takes place. By the end of this act the witches' prophesies have been fulfilled and order disrupted.

2.5 GLOSSARY

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| <i>Soliloquy:</i> | A soliloquy is addressed by a character, alone on stage, directly to the audience. (Sean McEvoy 65) |
| <i>Aside:</i> | An aside is a remark or speech directed at the audience <i>unheard</i> by the other characters on stage at the time, and is usually quite short. (Sean McEvoy 65) |
| <i>Divine right of kinship:</i> | According to this idea in the sixteenth century, especially during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, the king was considered to be divinely ordained. He was the representative of god on earth. This was in contrast to an earlier period where the king worked with support from the lords. The Tudor monarchy too believed in power vested in the monarch. |
| <i>Nobility:</i> | They were a group of people who by virtue of their birth belonged to the aristocracy. |
| <i>Feudal:</i> | The society was structured in a way that allegiances were clearly defined. In a feudal, land based system, where the King held absolute power people were expected to be loyal to the king. |
| <i>Subject:</i> | The ordinary people governed by the aristocracy. |
| <i>Familiars:</i> | Animals such as cat and toads were considered to be the "familiars" of the witches. |

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. Critically analyse any one soliloquy by Macbeth.
2. What are the different critical approaches to Lady Macbeth's character?
3. Describe the interaction between the witches and Macbeth.
4. What is the significance of the porter scene?
5. What is 'unnatural' about Duncan's murder?

2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. McEvoy, Sean. *Shakespeare: the Basics*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.
2. Muir, Kenneth. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Methuen, 1984.
3. Nagpal Payal. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Worldview P, 2016.



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UNIT 3 *MACBETH: PART-II*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Act III
 - 3.2.1 The Banquet Scene
 - 3.2.2 Hecate
- 3.3 Act IV
 - 3.3.1 The Witches' Predictions, the Apparitions and the Pageant
 - 3.3.2 Lady Macduff
 - 3.3.3 The State of Scotland and the Healing Powers of England
- 3.4 Act V
 - 3.4.1 The Sleepwalking Scene
 - 3.4.2 The Tragic End
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Glossary
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The previous unit presented a critical analysis of the first and second acts of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The focus remained on Macbeth's ambition and Lady Macbeth's single-minded concentration on executing the murder and making her husband the king of Scotland. These ambitions are placed against the established construct of the royalty on one hand and the disruptive space of the witches on the other. This unit will acquaint you critically with the sequence of events in Acts III, IV and V that lead to the tragic conclusion of the play.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with those questions and issues that are apparently situated on the sides of the play but reflect on the text centrally. They point towards specific scenes and characters that remain ordinarily out of the purview such as the Banquet scene, Hecate, Sleep-walking Scene and Lady Macduff. They dramatize the events and make them multi-dimensional. The poetic intensity therein underscores the felt experience. Equally importantly, we take up the Scottish ethos for grasping the action of the play. Together, these help us imagine political changes that complete the frightful picture of accumulated violence. It is suggested in the unit that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are only an extension of the general pattern of happenings in the play.

3.2 ACT III

This Act has seven scenes. At the end of the second act, Macbeth has become the king. But meanwhile there has been a lot of bloodshed. The third act is situated in a room in the palace at Forres. In it, the witches' predictions remain a concern throughout the play. Their understanding of the future forms the backdrop against which the game of power will be enacted. Twentieth century criticism, especially that of the second half focusses on the nature of the witches. Are these weird women or are these women who capture the changes in the social structure? The play raises these questions and leaves the reader to think about their nature.

Banquo iterates the witches' prediction as all of them have come true. He also wonders about the possibility of the realisation of the witches' prediction regarding his progeny. Caught in the web of his own ambitious drive, Macbeth, too thinks about the witches' prophecies with regard to Banquo. He is

insecure and wonders if the witches' predictions about Banquo would be true. A well-known soliloquy by Macbeth appears at this crucial juncture. Let us have a look at it:

To be thus is nothing, but to be safely thus:
Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be fear'd: 'tis much he dares;
And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear: and under him
My Genius is rebuk'd; as, it is said,
Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the Sisters,
When first they put the name of King upon me,
And bade them speak to him; then, prophet-like,
They hail'd him father to a line of kings:
Upon my head they plac'd a fruitless crown,
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrench'd with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murder'd;
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace,
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common Enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings!
Rather than so, come, fate, into the list.
And champion me to th' utterance! (3.1 47-71)

Macbeth contemplates on his act of pursuing ambition and its repercussions. He asks himself if he performed the act of murder to ensure this position for Banquo's children. Phrases such as "barren sceptre" and "fruitless crown" indicate Macbeth's deep-rooted ambition and the attention given to the witches' predictions. He has succumbed completely to the web spun by the sisters. The realm of Hecate, one of amorality, not only plays with Macbeth's sentiment but reflects social change. The existing values of the divine right of kingship, inheritance through primogeniture all stand challenged. A new order sets in, and it challenges the Elizabethan world order. The feudal notion of inheritance stands questioned and this in turn undermines any idea of authority. The Machiavellian strategy becomes complex and begins to work against itself. Like a feudal monarch, Macbeth wants to ensure the crown for himself and his progeny. He seeks the intervention of "fate" in the context.

The path to fulfilment of ambition is a spiral into more murder and killing. Having murdered Duncan, Macbeth wants to alter the witches' prophecy. He hires murderers to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance. The murderers are plausibly "officers, cast perhaps for some misdemeanour and out of luck" (Muir, Kenneth. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Methuen, 1984. 76). Macbeth instigates them against Banquo and urges them to murder. He tells the murderers:

Well then, now
Have you consider'd of my speeches?—know
That it was he, in the times past, which held you
Also under fortune, which you thought had been
Our innocent self? This I made good to you
In our last conference; pass'd in probation with you,
How you were borne in hand; how cross'd; the instruments;

Who wrought with them; and all things else, that might,
To half a soul, and to a notion craz'd,
Say, 'Thus did Banquo.' (3.1 75-83)

Mark how in the above lines, Macbeth blames Banquo for their condition, creating the situation to execute the murder. In fact, he chides them: "Are you so gospell'dd,/ To pray for this good man, and for his issue,/ Whose heavy hand had bow'd you to the grave" (3.1 86-88). Both murderers, therefore, commit themselves to the killing of Banquo. Who are these people who murder at Macbeth's command? They are men who have suffered "the vile blows and buffets of the world", "weary with disasters, tugg'd with fortune." Macbeth takes advantage of their situation to sustain power.

Meanwhile Lady Macbeth prepares for the King's banquet, for which Banquo has been invited. Macbeth continues to remain troubled about the witches' prediction regarding Banquo and Fleance. He tells Lady Macbeth: "O! full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!/ thou knows't that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives" (3.2 35-36). At this point, there is a distinct transformation in the attitudes of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Where Macbeth's language is steeped more and more in evil, Lady Macbeth's tone changes. The beginning of the Act signals Lady Macbeth's discomfiture. She realizes that desire has been realised without "content" and they are in a state of 'doubtful joy". She seeks a sense of normalcy in Macbeth and urges him to prepare for the banquet. However, Macbeth takes on the disruptive mantle and his language becomes more akin to the world of Hecate and the weird sisters. He seeks the cover of "seeling Night" to hide the "tender eye of pitiful Day" as Banquo's murder is about to take place. The imagery grows darker in the following lines:

And, with thy bloody and invisible hand,/ Cancel, and tear to pieces, that great bond/ Which keeps me pale!—Light thickens; and the crow/ Makes wing to th'rooky wood" 3.1 (48-51).

In the third scene of the Act, we have not two but three murderers who prepare to kill Banquo. There is speculation about the third one — Macbeth himself. But as Kenneth Muir points out, "Macbeth's agitation in III.iv, when he hears that Fleance has escaped is proof that he cannot have been present at the murder of Banquo" (86-87). The murderers kill Banquo but Fleance manages to escape. This disturbs Macbeth even more, as it increases the possibility of realisation of the witches' prediction about Banquo.

3.2.1 The Banquet Scene

The banquet scene is at once a celebration of Macbeth's position as king and an undermining of the same. His psychological disintegration is a symptom of the schism in the body politic. As the murderer reveals, "Fleance is scap'd", Macbeth begins to lose confidence and becomes insecure. He says:

There comes my fit again: I had else been perfect;
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
As broad and general as the casing air:
But now, I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears.—But Banquo's safe? (3.4 20-25)

In the banquet scene, Banquo's ghost appears and takes Macbeth's seat. The conflicts are rife in Macbeth's mind. Banquo's ghost reminds Macbeth both of his brutal killings and Fleance's claim to the throne. As the scene continues, Lady Macbeth tries hard to control the situation. She tells the nobles that Macbeth has been getting fits since his youth and that this is momentary. Aside, she challenges his masculinity and tells him, "O! these flaws and starts/ (Impostors to true fear), would well become/ A woman's story at winter's fire" (3.4 63-64). At this stage, Lady Macbeth is in control of herself but Macbeth is not. Banquo's ghost is visible only to him and indicates a troubled mind. (Remember the hallucination about the dagger). Shakespeare's use of Banquo's ghost is a reminder of the loss of humanity and friendship in the wake of Machiavellian ambition. Macbeth dreads this flash from the past, as he says,

If charnel-houses and our graves must send
Those that we bury, back, our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites. (.....)

Macbeth calls his fits of digression a “strange infirmity”. As Macbeth thinks of his deeds in the past, Banquo’s ghost re-enters to disturb him. He describes the ghost thus: “Thy bones are marowless, thy blood is cold;/ Thou hast no speculation in those eyes,/ Which thou dost glare with” (3.4 92-94). Macbeth is disturbed and unable to accept the enormity of his own actions. He challenges Banquo to come in any form, the “Russian bear, “the arm’d rhinoceros” or th’Hyrcean tiger”, but that of the ghost. As Macbeth sees Banquo’s ghost, the real world of kings and queens and the unreal ones of the witches and ghosts is seen in a flash. Lady Macbeth brings the banquet to a close. She urges the nobles to leave—“At once, good night:--/ Stand not upon the order of your going,/ But go at once” (3.4 118). The nobles are asked to leave immediately without following rank, an indication that order has once again been flouted. Macbeth’s subversion of Duncan’s right to the throne by violence is Machivellian; it established a new order through blood and gore. One must keep in mind how at the beginning of the play, Duncan’s reign was preserved by Macbeth’s display of violence on the battlefield. Both systems perpetuate through violence and are hence seen as wanting even as they reflect the warps and wefts of society. Macbeth can sense the anarchy:

It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood:
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
Augures and understood relations, have
By maggot-pies, and choughs, and rooks, brought forth
The secret’st man of blood. What is the night? (3.4 121-125)

The brutality of killing that Macbeth had been valourised for is suspect in the new context. The play makes us think about the nature of violence in relation to the state as body politic. Violence is anarchic and there is a thin line of demarcation in its use for or against the state. The violence used to defend the state can soon enough work against it destroying all that comes in its wake.

3.2.2 Hecate

In the next scene Macbeth meets the Weird Sisters. In 3.5, one can mark the unreal world of Hecate and the witches. Hecate’s monologue forms the entire scene in Act III and provides an insight into their world. Hecate chides the sisters for having excluded her from the plan “To trade and traffic with Macbeth,/ In riddles, and affairs of death;”. Even as she rues the fact that she was never called to play her part in affecting Macbeth’s destiny, she also sees him as the “wayward son”. He like most others is spiteful and wrathful. One can ask about the role of Machiavellian politics in this regard. Where it marks a distinct socio-historical shift, the brutality that accompanies it can hardly be the answer to the problems of the ordinary world. The play problematizes this issue. Read the following:

Have I not reason, beldams as you are,
Saucy, and overbold? How did you dare
To trade and traffic with Macbeth,
In riddles and affairs of death;
And I, the mistress of your charms,
The close contriver of all harms,
Was never called to bear my part,
Or show the glory of our art?
And, which is worse, all you have done
Hath been but for a wayward son,
Spiteful and wrathful; who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you.

But make amends now: Get you gone,
 And at the pit of Acheron
 Meet me i' th' morning: thither he
 Will come to know his destiny.
 Your vessels, and your spells, provide,
 Your charms, and everything beside.
 I am for th' air; This night I'll spend
 Unto a dismal and a fatal end:
 Great business must be wrought ere noon.
 Upon the corner of the moon
 There hangs a vap'rous drop profound.
 I'll catch it ere it come to ground:
 And that, distill'd by magic sleights,
 Shall raise such artificial sprites,
 As, by the strength of their illusion,
 Shall draw him on to his confusion.
 He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
 His hopes'bove wisdom, grace, and fear;
 And you all know, security
 Is mortal's chiefest enemy, (3.5 2-35)

Hecate's speech indicates that things are about to change rapidly. Macbeth will soon be caught in the web of his own trap. The "artificial sprites" spun by the witches shall draw him to "his confusion". He shall "spurn fate, scorn death." The power wielded by Hecate and the other witches is evident in these lines. They have indeed caught Macbeth's attention who will meet them again to know his destiny. The final statement about security indicates that Macbeth in his pursuit for a secure position is wrestling with the social forces. Having changed the course prescribed by the kingly powers, he now seeks stasis to secure his own position. Hecate reflects on this idea as she says, "security/ Is mortal's chiefest enemy". The next scene, 3.6, voices the suspicions and discomfort of the nobles as they sense Macbeth's machinations. Lennox says, "Men must not walk too late". He recounts how Duncan was killed and Malcolm and Donalbain fled the country. The security guards too were killed by Macbeth as he claimed to grieve at the King's death. Similarly, Banquo was murdered and Fleance fled. The scene also reveals how Malcolm seeks allies abroad. Interestingly, just as Macbeth, one of the generals in Duncan's army worked to fortify his position, so, too, Macduff gradually emerges to ensure Malcolm's claim to the throne. It seems to have become a vicious cycle offering no escape.

3.3 ACT IV

3.3.1 The Witches' Predictions, the Apparitions and the Pageant

This act begins in the same way as Act I, with the witches at a house in Forres with a "boiling cauldron". Like the first scene that made significant predictions about Macbeth, this scene, too, foretells what is going to happen to him in the future. These lines reveal the witches' intentions as also the world they inhabit. They have access to plants and animals and they understand their world in a different manner. The words are spoken like a puzzle and in a manner of equivocation. The reference to spells would "thrice" create an eerie atmosphere. The witches have access to the forest, its flora and fauna. Their additions to the cauldron range from the "toad", "Fillet of a fenny snake", "eye of newt" and "toe of frog", and many such. It also has "Root of hemlock, digg'd I' th'dark", "Gall of goat, and slips of yew". The spell, "Double, double toil and trouble;/ Fire burn; and cauldron, bubble" remains a refrain in the play. The witches prepare for Macbeth's coming as decided in the previous scene by Hecate. Macbeth seeks the witches' attention thus:

I conjure you, by that which you profess,

Howe'er you come to know it, answer me:
Though you untie the winds, and let them fight
Against the churches; though the yesty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up;
Though bladed corn be lodg'd and trees blown down;
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
Of Nature's germens tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken, answer me
To what I ask you. (4.1 50-61)

Macbeth presents the witches as a disruptive force. They let loose elements that fight the order of the day. They fight against the churches, topple castles and make palaces and pyramids slope. In this way, the world of the witches challenges the established order. The supernatural or the fantastic is the alternative realm. The predictions made by the witches through the apparitions they invoke determine the course of the play. Their predictions are as follows: "Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! beware Macduff;/ Beware the Thane of Fife.—Dismiss me.—Enough" (4.1. 70-1) And Be bloody, bold, and resolute: laugh to scorn/
The power of man, for none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth (79-81)

Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care
Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are:
Macbeth shall never vanquished be, until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
Shall come against him.(4.1 90-93)

The first apparition is that of an "armed head". It is believed that this represents Macdonald's decapitated head brought in by Macbeth to Duncan's court and foreshadows his own which will be brought by Macduff. The second apparition is that of the "bloody child". This could be Macduff born by Caesarean section. It could also be Fleance or the line of Banquo meant to succeed Macbeth. The third apparition is that of a "child crowned with a tree in his hand". This could be Malcolm who will finally inherit the throne. However, Macbeth misses the implications of these apparitions and the tone of equivocation as he says, "Then live Macduff: what I need fear of thee." Hearing these predictions by the apparitions, Macbeth is convinced that no one can dislodge him from his position. However, he misses the tone of equivocation in their predictions, something he realises only much later. The witches warn Macbeth about Macduff. They urge him to be brave and bold. But this glimpse of the future gives Macbeth the illusion of security. It tells him that no one of woman born can harm him. The witches also tell him that he need not bother till Birnam Wood marches to Dunsinane. These two ideas make him feel secure. He believes in words such as: "Who can impress the forest; bid the tree/ Unfix his earth bound root?" (4.1 95). Doing this would be unnatural and hence impossible. Macbeth believes he can never be defeated. However, going by the witches' earlier prophecy he continues to feel insecure and asks if Banquo would be king. Following his question, there is a show of eight kings. Macbeth is disturbed as the last one in this pageant of kings is Banquo.

Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo: Down!
Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs:—and thy hair,
Thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first:—
A third is like the former.—filthy hags!
Why do you show me this?—A fourth?—Start, eyes!
What! will the line stretch out to th' crack of doom?
Another yet?—A seventh?—I'll see no more:—
And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass,
Which shows me many more; and some I see,
That twofold balls and treble sceptres carry.

Horrible sight!—Now, I see, 'tis true;
For the blood-bolter'd Banquo smiles upon me,
And points at them for his.—but why
(4.1 112-124)

The witches' prediction regarding Macduff plays on Macbeth's mind and the endless cycle of violence that engulfs the self continues. As Macbeth gets to know that Macduff has "fled to England", a brutal perpetration of murder begins. In an important aside Macbeth says, "From this moment,/The very firstlings of my heart shall be/ The firstlings of my hand" (4.1). He decides to seize Macduff's castle at Fife and kill his wife and children. Note how Macbeth gets trapped in his own actions as he continues to murder with greater ferocity.

3.3.2 Lady Macduff

The scene shifts to Macduff's castle where blood and gore will take place. This scene with its vivid descriptions of brutal killings alerts us to the nature of violence in the play. Macduff has fled to England making his family the sacrificial goat. However, this idea sits uneasily with Lady Macduff and she is quick to ask—"Wisdom! To leave his wife, to leave his babes". She resents this and says, "He wants the natural touch". According to her even the "poor wren" fights for its young ones but Macduff has abandoned his family. This draws attention to how loyalty and construction of the nation are made on the bodies of women and children. Macduff's son appears briefly, but plays an important role. He is reasonable, practical, witty and understands his mother. Take a look at the following lines:

Son: Why should I, mother? Poor birds they are not set for.
My father is not dead, for all your saying.

Lady Macd.: Yes, he is dead; how wilt thou do for a father?

Son: Nay, how will you do for a husband?

Lady Macd.: Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.

Son: Then you'll buy 'em to sell again.

Lady Macd.: Thou speak'st with all thy wit: and yet, i' faith,
With wit enough for thee.

...

Lady Macd.: Now, God help thee, poor monkey!
But how wilt thou do for a father?

Son: If he were dead, you'd weep for

him: if you would not, it were a good sign

that I should quickly have a new father. (4.235-43, 58-62)

This witty exchange between the mother and son is light-hearted. But mark the perceptive nature of the young boy brought to fore in a few lines. The killing of the entire family acquires greater tragic intensity. Lady Macduff who had already been apprised of the situation by Rosse asks—"Whither should I fly?/ I have done no harm/ But I remember now/ I am in this earthly world, where, to do harm/ Is often laudable" (4.2 72-75). She thinks herself to be a pawn in the hands of her husband and his state machinations. In all these strategies and counter strategies she is abandoned by Macduff and can be easily dispensed with. Lady Macduff has the chance to flee but does not do so. She decides to stay on and is brutally killed by the murderers.

3.3.3 The State of Scotland and the Healing Powers of England

The next scene is between Malcolm and Macduff and it describes the state of Scotland. Malcolm's speech is reflective and searching as he laments: "Each new morn,/ New widows howl, new orphans cry". He

maps Macbeth's transition from a good person to a treacherous man. His speech indicates how one that is good also has the potential to transform into something evil or monstrous. This is in line with the tone of equivocation in the play. Malcolm notes how Macbeth who worked for the interest of the state has ended up destroying it completely. He says, "Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell:/ Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace/ Yet Grace must still look so". Malcolm asks Macduff as to why he left his family in haste. To this Macduff replies:

Bleed, bleed, poor country!
Great tyranny, lay thou thy basis sure,

....

Malcolm:

I think our country sinks beneath the yoke.
It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash
Is added to her wounds. I think withal
There would be hands uplifted in my right;
And here from gracious England have I offer
Of goodly thousands. But, for all this,
When I shall tread upon the tyrant's head,
Or wear it on my sword, yet my poor country
Shall have more vices than it had before,
More suffer, and more sundry ways than ever,
By him that shall succeed. (4.3 31-32, 39-48)

Malcolm presents England as a solution to the problems that Scotland is facing. Scotland has become a country with gashes and wounds whereas England provides the healing touch. Malcolm tests Macduff's loyalty towards him and the state as he says that even if the "tyrant" was quashed, the "poor country" will have more vices than before. The exchange between Malcolm and Macduff ponders over the attributes of a good ruler. Malcolm deliberately assigns negative qualities to himself to assess Macduff's allegiance. He tells the nobleman that he has vices which if they are revealed, "black Macbeth/ Will seem as pure as snow". To himself Malcolm assigns "voluptuousness"—"your wives, your daughters,/ Your matrons, and your maids, could not fill up" (4.3 61-62). However, Macduff believes in him and says that "Boundless intemperance" is a tyranny but "there cannot be/ That vulture in you, to devour so many". The second evil Malcolm presents in his persona is that of "avarice". Here, too, Macduff believes that "Scotland had foisons to fill up your will". Malcolm then shares with Macduff his complete lack of "king-becoming graces". Malcolm considers himself devoid of "Justice, Verity, Temp'rance, Stableness,/ Bounty, Perseverance, Mercy, Lowliness,/ Devotion, Patience, Courage, Fortitude". At this Macduff laments that such a person is "Fit to govern?/ No, not to live.—O nation miserable!/ With an untitled bloody tyrant bloody-sceptered,/ When shalt thou see thy wholesome days again/ Since that the truest issue of thy throne/ By his own interdiction stands accus'd,/ And does blaspheme his breed?" (4.3 102-109).

With this response Macduff has won Malcolm's confidence. He refers to Macduff as "Child of integrity". Malcolm finally speaks his mind to Macduff as he tells him that all the blames he had taken on himself are "strangers to my nature". He tells him, "I am yet/ Unknown to woman; never was forsworn;/ Scarcely have coveted what was my own;/ At no time broke my faith: Would not betray/ The Devil to his fellow; and delight/ No less in truth, than life: my first false-speaking/ Was this upon myself." (4.3 125-131). The idea of kingship and loyalty is discussed again. Macbeth's loyalty to the King and the state wins for him Duncan's confidence. A new cycle can be seen at work and one can observe a similar pattern at work here. Macduff will be the loyal subject to Malcolm through his love for the nation. Macbeth's sentiment was entwined with ambition. At this stage Macduff advocates selfless love for Scotland and rejects the possibility of a corrupt ruler. Such an attitude endears him to the state.

This scene also brings in the relationship between Scotland and England. The former is seen as a country with worries but the latter is a nation that has the capacity to provide the solution. The King of England is

seen as exemplary; he is both a king and a healer. Take a look at Malcolm's speech to understand this dynamic.

'Tis called the evil:

A most miraculous work in this good King,
Which often, since my here-remain in England,
I have seen him do. How he solicits Heaven,
Himself best knows; but strangely-visited people,
All swoln and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The mere despair of surgery, he cures,
Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
Put on with holy prayers: And, 'tis spoken,
To the succeeding royalty he leaves
The healing benediction. With this strange virtue,
He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy;
And sundry blessings hang about his throne,
That speak him full of grace. (4.3 147-158)

These lines present the English King as one who gives stability to the nation and heals its people especially through his "miraculous work"; an idea found wanting in Scotland. The scene ends with Rosse informing Macduff of the murder of his family and servants. Malcolm extends the metaphor of healing as he urges Macduff to make "med'cines of our great revenge,/ To cure this deadly grief". But there is a shift in tone at the end of this scene. It is as Malcolm points out "manly". Macduff seeks revenge in killing Macbeth who he refers to as the "fiend of Scotland". This once again brings all within the cycle of violence.

3.4 ACT V

3.4.1 The Sleepwalking Scene

The last act begins with a discussion of Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking. The Waiting-Gentlewoman apprises the Doctor of Lady Macbeth's strange behaviour of walking in her sleep. She informs him:

"Since his Majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep". (5.1 4-8).

The Doctor interprets this as a "great perturbation in nature" and asks if she speaks anything in this "slumbry agitation". The Gentlewoman refuses to reveal the details. At this point, Lady Macbeth walks in with a candle in hand. They both watch her rubbing her hands in her sleep. The following lines from Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking scene are the oft quoted ones and shed new light on her character:

Lady M. Out, damned spot! Out, I say!—One; two; why, then 'tis time to do't. —Hell is murky. —Fie, my Lord, fie! A soldier and afeard? —what need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? —Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

Doct. Do you mark that?

Lady M. 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.

Doct. Go to, go to. You have known what you should not.

Gent. She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that. Heaven knows what she has known.

Lady M. Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, Oh, Oh!

Doct. What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

Gent. I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity of the whole body.
(5.1 33-51)

Lady Macbeth's understanding of recent events is important. It seems as if the deeds of blood and gore are condensed into the spots on her hands. The sight of blood disturbs her. It remains ingrained in her mind as a symbol of the deed performed by Macbeth and her; even though she was unable to kill Duncan as he reminds her of her own father. But her erratic speech is important for the reference to the Thane of Fife and his wife. The metonymic image of blood keeps on multiplying from Duncan to the Thane of Fife's wife. It is indeed a bloody picture. Lady Macbeth realises that all the perfumes of Arabia will not take the smell of blood away from her hands. All these murders have been committed by Macbeth or executed on his orders. But, she sees herself as one with Macbeth and the impact of these killings is transposed onto her. The Gentlewoman's comment qualifies it further. She feels that she would not possess a heart of this sort for the "dignity" of the body. This indicates how Lady Macbeth has violated mind and body in being both an active and a passive accomplice. Lady Macbeth's final call is "What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed." The Doctor realises the enormity of what was being said and is quick to point out that such a disease is beyond his experience. He realises that Lady Macbeth's mind is seized with horror at the deeds as they are "unnatural". He says, "More needs she the divine than the physician."

3.4.2 The Tragic End

The next scene shifts to the country near Dunsinane. The soldiers discuss how Malcolm and Macduff supported by the English forces are fast approaching Scotland. They will meet near Birnam wood. They refer to Macbeth as the "tyrant". He is seen as anarchic by them—"Some say he's mad; others, that lesser hate him,/ Do call it valiant fury" (5.2. 13-16). All in all, they also realise how he will no longer be able to sustain his rule. Macbeth has failed as ruler as "Those he commands move only in command,/ Nothing in love."

On his part, Macbeth is seen in a room in his castle as he clings to the witches' prophecies that nothing can harm him till Birnam wood marches to Dunsinane, and that no one born of woman can kill him. Even as Lady Macbeth's condition is made known to him, he instructs the Doctor to "Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow." Meanwhile the soldiers in Malcolm's army are instructed to prepare by cutting down a bough and hold it before them and wait for the opportune moment. Macbeth is informed of Lady Macbeth's death and he says,

She should have died hereafter.
There would have been a time for such a word—
To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (5.5 17-28)

Note how these lines bring forth the transience of life. Macbeth caught within the web of politics is struck by the temporariness of life as he experiences the loss of Lady Macbeth. The messenger informs Macbeth of a moving grove and his worst fears prove to be true. According to the witches his safety was incumbent

on Birnam wood moving up to Dunsinane. He thought this to be an impossibility but soon enough realises the witches' tone was one of "equivocation". Malcolm with the support of Macduff and young Siward has moved to Dunsinane. Macbeth is confident of his invincibility as he believes that there can be none not born of a woman. He boasts to Macduff, "I bear a charmed life; which must not yield/ To one of woman born". Macduff informs him that "Macduff was from his mother's womb/ Untimely ripp'd." Macbeth realises the real meaning of the witches' prophecy. He calls them "juggling fiends" that "palter with us in a double sense." The witches' chant—"Double double toil and trouble" reverberates in this context. Macbeth is finally slain by Macduff. In the final scene in the castle, as Macduff enters with Macbeth's decapitated head, one can mark the beginning of another cycle of violence. Macduff's rhetoric about love for the state has evidenced itself in the form of an extreme state of violence. It is precisely this kind of valour that Macbeth had been praised for at the beginning of the play. These overtones disturb the semblance of peace and prosperity as Macduff stands in the same relation with Malcolm as did Macbeth with Duncan. One is left with uneasy thoughts as one thinks whether this cycle of violence will really end. The play ends with Malcolm's coronation at Scone. He also calls his thanes and kinsmen, earls, a term that belonged to the English court. The play remains a tragedy not just because of the killing of Macbeth but also due to the relationship of the subject to the king and the state, an allegiance cemented with violence.

3.5 LET US SUM UP

This chapter analysed Acts III, IV and V of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The play is a tragedy and it ends with the killing of Macbeth. These three acts trace a rapid deterioration in *Macbeth*. The second act ends with establishing Macbeth as king, but in the third one that power of his as a king becomes unstable. As blood and gore continue with the killing of Banquo and Macduff's family, it starts hanging heavy on Macbeth's mind. He is both disturbed and insecure as he sees Banquo's ghost take his seat in the banquet scene. Hecate's world and the witches' predictions continue to influence Macbeth. Brutality and an endless sequence of violence finally shakes all sense of normalcy. The fifth act focusses on Lady Macbeth and her sleepwalking and death. The Act also concentrates on the attributes of a good king while bringing forth the relationship between England and Scotland. The problems of Scotland are resolved with the help of the English forces. The witches' prophesies are realised as Macduff kills Macbeth. The play ends with Malcolm as king and Macduff his loyal subject, a replication of the Macbeth-Duncan equation. The tragic overtones disturb the sense of peace established at the end of the play.

3.6 GLOSSARY

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| <i>Barren sceptre:</i> | The idea that Macbeth will not beget kings. |
| <i>Misdemeanour:</i> | Bad behavior. |
| <i>Parricide:</i> | Killing of the father; in this case the King. |
| <i>Lion-mettled:</i> | Brave heart. |
| <i>Hyrcean tiger:</i> | Hyrkania is a place known for its tigers. |
| <i>Acheron:</i> | one of the rivers of Hades. |
| <i>Twofold balls and treble sceptres:</i> | They refer to King James I who had united the thrones of England and Scotland. |
| <i>Boundless intemperance:</i> | over-indulgence. |
| <i>Juggling fiends:</i> | deceptive. |
| <i>Palter:</i> | trick. |

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Critically analyse the Banquet Scene.
2. Does Macbeth understand the real meaning of the apparitions? Comment.
3. What are the implications of Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking?
4. Discuss Hecate's monologue.
5. Analyse the theme of equivocation in the play.

6. What do the witches predict about Macbeth's future? Are these realised? Discuss
7. Bring out the idea of violence and its relation to the state in Macbeth.

3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Muir, Kenneth. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Methuen, 1984.
2. Nagpal Payal. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Worldview P, 2016.



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UNIT 4 *MACBETH: CRITICAL RESPONSES*

Structure

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is one of the most critically acclaimed tragedies. It has a rich critical oeuvre. Critics have responded in varied ways to the play. There are Feminist, Marxist, New Historicist approaches amongst many others to the play. This unit will outline some of these approaches to provide an overview of the way in which the play has been read and interpreted over the years.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be reading the wide ranging interest that Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* evoked over the centuries following the play. In a true sense, the play was at the centre of critical comment and analysis. The process began in the early eighteenth century and from then on has continued uninterrupted. Initially, it appealed as a play that showed the ethos of Elizabethan-Jacobean period. Later, it was a subject of psychological probing. Still, later, the play assumed the form of political conflicts and assessments of nationalist as well as crime-related developments across the ideological spectrum. The cultural-ideological concerns gained depth of vision as well as sustained engagement with the good fighting evil in the human imagination.

4.2 EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY CRITICISM: A BRIEF NOTE

4.2.1 Samuel Johnson: “Preface to Shakespeare” (1765)

The eighteenth century critic Samuel Johnson, edited the bard’s plays and in the Preface, calls him a man who holds a “faithfull mirror to manners and life.” In tune with critical thought of his time, Johnson appreciates Shakespeare’s plays for their observation of the society in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Johnson calls *Macbeth* a “tragedy dependent upon “enchantment” to “produce the chief events by the assistance of supernatural agents.” This would have been seen as an act of transgression in its time. However, Johnson proposes that Shakespeare was in no danger as the “reality” of witchcraft and enchantment has been “credited by the common people” (Miola, Robert S. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New York and London, 2014. 227-228). According to the critic, the trial of the witches at Warbois during Elizabeth’s reign was an example to corroborate this idea. Johnson draws attention to King James’s concerns about witchcraft as presented in *Daemonologie* (1597). This book was

reprinted at London when James assumed the English throne. Subsequently the Act against Witchcraft was revised in 1604. As a result, the world of witches and the supernatural was a believable one—"it became not only unpolite but criminal to doubt it" (229). Against this background, according to Johnson, Shakespeare would not have been censured. He has only followed "such histories as were then thought true; nor can it be doubted that the scenes of enchantment, however they may now be ridiculed, were both by himself and his audience thought awful and affecting" (229). Graymalkin parallels the witches' use of the cat. The 'familiar' were known to destroy the neighbour's cattle, and "killing swine" also produced melancholy fits and loss of flesh. All these ideas prevalent at the time are used by Shakespeare in *Macbeth*.

In discussing the character of Lady Macbeth, Johnson praises Shakespeare for his understanding of human nature. She persuades her husband to commit the murder by urging "excellence and dignity of courage, a glittering idea which has dazzled mankind from age to age" (229). Macbeth's famous lines on the death of the queen, "She should have died hereafter./ There would have been time for—such a world!—/ Tomorrow,..." has evoked critical response. Johnson considers them to be an example of the understanding of human nature that "tomorrow will be happier than today, but tomorrow and tomorrow steals over us unenjoyed and unregarded." In short Johnson's appreciation of Shakespeare's plays rested on their presentation of observed reality of the time in a manner that was real, objective and humane.

4.2.2 S.T. Coleridge: "On *Macbeth*" (1819)

A thinker, philosopher of the Romantic tradition, S.T. Coleridge, praised Shakespeare for his use of imagination. In his essay "On *Macbeth*", the nineteenth century critic, Coleridge posits *Macbeth* in contrast to *Hamlet* especially in terms of the opening of the play. In *Hamlet*, there is a transition from "the simplest forms of conversation to the language of impassioned intellect—yet the intellect still remaining the seat of passion." In the case of *Macbeth*, the appeal is to the imagination and the emotions therewith" (Miola 233). In short for Coleridge, *Macbeth* appeals to the passion via imagination whereas *Hamlet* appeals to the intellect. Coleridge's comments have particularly been cited for his comments on the Porter scene. He says:

Hence the movement throughout is the most rapid of all Shakespeare's plays; and hence also, with the exception of the disgusting passage of the Porter (2.3), which I dare pledge myself to demonstrate to be an interpolation of the actors, there is not, to the best of my remembrance, a single pun or play on words in the whole drama. (233)

Coleridge defends Shakespeare on the charge of "punning" and sees in *Macbeth* the absence of puns. He also notes an "absence of comedy, nay, even of irony and philosophic contemplation in *Macbeth*—the play being wholly and purely tragic" (233). The important points made by Coleridge pertain to *Macbeth*'s appeal to the imagination and the absence of pun restoring it completely within the ambit of pure tragedy. Morality is not "equivocal" and the play focuses on "rage" caused by "disruption of anxious thought and the quick transition of fear into it" (233).

Coleridge attributes the creation of the witches entirely to Shakespeare as part of his collection of Ariel and Caliban. Differing from Johnson he argues,

They are wholly different from any representation of witches in the contemporary writers and yet presented a sufficient external resemblance to the creatures of vulgar prejudice to act immediately on the audience. Their characters consist in the imaginative disconnected from the good; they are shadowy, obscure and fearfully anomalous of physical nature, the lawless of human nature, elemental avengers without sex or kin. (234)

It is clear that for the critic, *Macbeth* remains a product of the imagination. The witches are markedly different from contemporary portrayal despite any "external resemblance." He understands them as "imaginative disconnected from the good;" they are anarchic and out of the structure of morality. In this way they determine what Coleridge calls the "character" of the drama. As for Lady Macbeth, Coleridge

sees her as “deluded by ambition” and bringing shame on her husband. Her invocation of the spirits is another example, for Coleridge, of the imagination familiarised to “dreadful conceptions.” Note that the critic had in the famous *Biographia Literaria* written about the role of imagination and made a distinction between the primary and secondary forms of imagination. It was a faculty particularly important for thinkers of this period. Coleridge’s understanding of Shakespeare’s plays is mediated through the role of imagination in creative thinking.

4.2.3 Thomas de Quincey: “On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*” (1823)

Another nineteenth century critic, de Quincey, focuses on Act II, Scene III. The gruesome murders have already been done and the moment is followed by Macduff and Lennox knocking at the gate, followed by the Porter scene. His comments have been understood to mean a defence of the Porter scene in the play. Unlike Coleridge’s stress on imagination, de Quincey interprets in *Macbeth* “strife of mind” and one that is greater than that in his wife. But the “murderous mind of necessity is finally to be presumed in both.” This was a neat contrast to Duncan’s “gracious” nature. It also explained, in *Macbeth* the transition from “human nature” to “fiendish nature”. Lady Macbeth is “unsexed” and Macbeth seems devil like. The normalcy of human nature has as if gone into a “syncope” for a new order to set in. He explains the knocking thus:

Hence it is, that, when the deed is done, when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced: the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish; the pulses of life are beginning to beat again; and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that had suspended them. (238)

4.3 A.C. BRADLEY: *SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY* (1904)

Shakespearean Tragedy is a series of lectures delivered by A.C. Bradley on Shakespeare’s tragedies. In it, the critic interprets the play in the context of the text. Even as references to certain other texts of the time might be there, Bradley analyses the cause of tragedy and the fall of the tragic hero. In the case of *Macbeth*, he takes on from the point made by Coleridge. Whereas the nineteenth century critic had compared the play to *Hamlet* and cite difference, Bradley compares the two plays in terms of their likeness. He cites the fact that a Shakespearean tragedy “has a special tone or atmosphere of its own, quite perceptible, however difficult to describe” (278). *Macbeth* is marked by “darkness” or “blackness”. He then cites many instances in the play that contribute to this idea.

According to Bradley, even though “the influence of the Witches’ prophecies on *Macbeth* is very great, it is quite clearly shown to be an influence and nothing more. There is no sign whatever in the play that Shakespeare meant the actions of *Macbeth* to be forced on him by an external power, whether that of the Witches, or of their ‘masters’, or of Hecate” (287). For the critic, *Macbeth*’s tragedy lies within himself and not on some outside agency. His criticism of the play rests on an understanding of words in the play that carry it to its tragic outcome. Bradley presents a long commentary on the thought processes in *Macbeth*’s mind and the way in which he would have been influenced by his own desire as also later the enormity of his act. As he says, “...the consciousness of guilt is stronger in him than the consciousness of failure” (301). Bradley points out how we continue to sympathise with *Macbeth* even at the end of the play and see in him something “sublime.”

With regard to Lady *Macbeth*, he says that she is “the most commanding and perhaps the most awe-inspiring figure that Shakespeare drew” (307). Mark that Bradley’s analysis of her rests entirely on the way she is drawn in the play. He says of her, “She helps him, but never asks his help. She leans on nothing but herself” (309). She is marked by “courage and force of will”. These lines show how at the turn of the century, the response to Shakespeare’s plays changed. His plays were understood only in terms of conventional ideas of plot and character. Moreover, all this was filtered through Bradley’s

understanding of character and the sequence of events. Later criticism begins to incorporate texts of the time to assess how the characters were 'fashioned' in specific ways.

4.4 THE MARXIST APPROACH TO *MACBETH*

A movement that arose in the mid-nineteenth century with the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Marxism was developed in many different ways in the twentieth century. It made a great contribution to literature and literary studies as it drove home the consciousness of class antagonism and social positioning of the marginal social groups. In the modern period these ideas manifested themselves through other movements that kept culture in the forefront. Through it, critics approached the social context of socio-economic groups relegated to the periphery of society. It is important to look at some seminal thinkers who have looked at Shakespeare's *Macbeth* from a Marxist perspective. In the article "Macbeth", Victor Kiernan explores the historical context and the plausibility of Shakespeare's familiarity with the same. The critic interprets Macbeth's character as one that brings in 'change'. This belongs not to Macbeth as an individual, but it is a 'change' that belongs to its time. There are social forces in a state of collision and this is of interest in the play. He places Macbeth as the "second of two usurpers of a throne in the tragedies", the first being Claudius in *Hamlet*. Kiernan sees the time of the play as close to the succession of James I and one that is surrounded by uncertainty due to rebellion; the Gunpowder Plot being a case in point. The critic also points towards Shakespeare's understanding of Scotland as one that needed a purging of sorts as it had "an undefined malady in the body politic".

Macbeth's "reign of terror" is contrasted with Duncan's virtue as "most sainted king" or that of Edward who is seen as the healer, who has "heavenly gift of prophecy". According to Kiernan, Malcolm is introduced "as a young prince of a new strain". So Malcolm is supposed to cleanse Scotland off its evils. Kiernan rightly explains how this raises the issue of people's right to throw off a ruler like Macbeth. He states:

He is a usurper, but the argument would seem to hold good even against the most legitimate monarch; the dividing-line is at any rate faint. Shakespeare is not free to follow it to its logical conclusion; but he is ineffectually challenging James's doctrine that the worst conceivable ruler, once anointed and sceptered, must be submitted to uncomplainingly. (Kiernan, Victor. *Eight Tragedies of Shakespeare: A Marxist Study*. London & New York: Verso, 1996. 128-129)

Kiernan places the Macbeth-Lady Macbeth partnership in the context of the murders. On the one hand the critic looks at how Macbeth has to prove himself to her, on the other how he later becomes assertive in planning and executing. Macbeth faints in the banquet scene even as Lady Macbeth retains her composure. In this context the critic sees the family, "the microcosm of the society" as being torn apart. Kiernan does not pay too much attention to the witches. He sees them as prompting Macbeth further in his enterprise. But his primary interest remains seeing the play in its context and the equation between Scotland and England. As he finally explains:

Macbeth makes an apt symbol of times when men feel mysterious forces at work, at bottom social forces not yet clearly recognised for what they are, which turn individuals almost irresistibly against their fellows. He felt it somehow dishonourable to shrink from a challenge to reach the summit, whatever the hazards. In Lukacs' words, the play is an illustration of how great historical collisions could be translated into human terms and imbued with dramatic life (*Historical Novel* 137). In a time like Shakespeare's a society may be ripe for change, but only individuals ruthlessly prepared to defy old rules of conduct can lead the way towards a shattering of the old order, and an opening towards a new one...It led him to a nihilistic rejection of life, as a cosmic failure, without meaning...Feudalism was giving way to capitalism, even if neither of these terms had yet been invented. (138)

Kiernan's point of view analyses the triggers in Macbeth's decision making from believing in the witches, Lady Macbeth and most of all to his own inner impulses. He locates the Scotland-England conflict and

Macbeth's own developments in this context. This understanding of the changes fermenting in the social structure places Macbeth within a social context. His disregard for the old order helps us understand Macbeth not as an individual but as a symbol of change as brought out by the individual as force.

Marxist critic, Anand Prakash in an essay written especially for an edition on *Macbeth* titles his essay, "Reaffirming Humanity Against Odds: A View of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*." The present-day critic explains the play in the context of the struggle for humanism, an idea he thinks, is central to the world of Shakespeare's plays. He is quick to point out how the play is about "larger processes than individual initiatives". It is not any one factor but "a whole train of tendencies rooted in the existing political climate" that work to control the "main players". This line of argument places the play against the context of its age. For instance, the witches are seen as "figures situated at the periphery." The people who are at the centre of things have pushed them to the margins. According to Prakash, the play is then a "head-on collision of the two discourses, one that determines the operation of high politics and the other of the deprived" (178). Macbeth is therefore placed at the centre of these conflicts. Shakespeare may have referred to a 'source' for the character of Macbeth, but the play belongs to the England of its time—"the substance of modernity in Tudor England" (180).

4.5 CULTURAL MATERIALISM

Most criticism of the early twentieth century toed the line of Bradley and the New Critical theory by focussing on the text as a closed unit. The Marxist understanding of Shakespeare's plays in terms of class and later culture led to new ways of interpreting the plays. Feminist criticism, new historicist and cultural materialist reading brought in a whole range of issues that led to the discussion of Shakespeare's plays in a way that was vital and dynamic. New Historicists and cultural materialists have understood the play against the socio-cultural and historical milieu of the period in which the play was produced and read. Placing *Macbeth* in the context of the social histories of the time helps understand the different ways of interpreting the manifold aspects of the play. The cultural materialist position helps us read into the construction of people located on the margins of the society. The women, commoners and people belonging to the lower orders can be understood just as well as the world of kings and queens. One of the important aspects in *Macbeth* is that of the monarch and his claim to the throne. The play is set in Jacobean England i.e. the time period when King James VI of Scotland has taken over as the monarch of England as King James I of England. In the process the English and Scottish thrones were united.

This was not an easy transition given the fact that there was no direct heir to Queen Elizabeth. The vacuum left by the Queen led to rival claims. Even as the ascension of King James was seen as viable, it was not without its opponents. In this context it helps to look at some interesting documents from that period that foreground this debate.

In his article "*Macbeth: History, Ideology and Intellectuals*" (1992), Alan Sinfield uses a cultural materialist approach to discuss the disturbances in the play that create conflict in a Jamesian reading of the play. Sinfield uses George Buchanan's *De jure regni* (1579) and *History of Scotland* (1582) in his argument.

He looks at the sixteenth century England as a development from "feudalism to the absolutist state". He explains how in the case of the former, the king's power was "often little more than nominal". According to him, "authority was distributed also among overlapping non-national institutions such as the church, estates, assemblies, regions, and towns. In the absolutist state, power became centralized in the figure of the monarch, the exclusive source of legitimacy" (219). This indicates how the monarch tried to amass power and assert her/himself. An absolutist assertion, partial or total also meant that there would be "dissidents". For Sinfield, this was a broad category that comprised, "aristocrats like the Earls of Northumberland and Westmorland who led the northern rising of 1569, and the Duke of Norfolk, who plotted to replace Elizabeth with Mary Queen of Scots in 1571; clergy who refused the state religion; gentry who supported them and who tried to raise awkward matters in Parliament; writers and printers

who published criticism of state policy; the populace when it complained about food, prices, enclosures, or anything” (Nagpal 219).

The rebellions in the sixteenth century draw our attention to the dissatisfaction as well as the potential of assertion in the different social groups in society from the clergy onwards to the commoners. For instance, the Catholic persecution and the Gunpowder Plot. In this context the monarch sought to naturalise the idea of the absolutist state. Sinfield uses documents such as the sentence passed upon Jane Wiseman in 1598, the works of George Buchanan to examine the formation of the absolutist state and Macbeth’s relation to the same. King James’ own work *Basilikon Doron* (1599) protected the idea of absolutism in the state by making a distinction between the “lawful good king” and the “usurping tyrant”. This distinction meant that an act of violence committed by the king was acceptable and in the latter it was a crime. Analysed against this distinction *Macbeth* becomes a play that can no longer, as Sinfield points out, be read in terms of a Jamesian reading. It has to be read also in terms of the disturbance created by the Buchanan text. He refers to Buchanan’s *De jure regni* (1579) and *History of Scotland* (1582). Keeping these in mind, Sinfield draws attention to Macduff who at the end of the play stands in the same relation to Malcolm, as Macbeth did to Duncan:

The Jamesian reading requires that Macbeth be a distinctively “evil” eruption in a “good” system; awareness of the role of Macduff in Malcolm’s state alerts us to the fundamental instability of power relations during the transition to absolutism, and consequently to the uncertain validity of the claim of the state to the legitimate use of violence. Certainly Macbeth is a murderer and an oppressive ruler, but he is one version of the absolutist ruler, not the polar opposite. (Nagpal, Payal. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Worldview P, 2016. 226)

Sinfield makes a case for a clear political analysis of the play keeping in mind the relevance of the texts and documents of the time that found their way into the play or had a bearing on it in some manner.

A brief look at some of the debates of the time make Sinfield’s point clear. For instance, Catholic priests like Robert Parsons contested James’ right to the English throne in 1595 in *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crown of England*. He raised the issue of the succession to the English throne, an issue not meant to be discussed at the time. Parsons also brought in the role of the commonwealth and challenged the “absolute” power of the monarch. Given the uneasy political context to England and Scotland, King James’ claim to the throne was not uncontested. He stated:

...albeit the nearness of each man’s succession in blood were evidently known, yet were it uncertain who should prevail, for that it is not enough for a man to be next only in blood, thereby to pretend a crown, but that other circumstances must concur, and he that is second, third, fourth, fifth or last, may lawfully be preferred before the first. (Carroll, William C. *Macbeth: Texts and Contexts*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 1999. 195)

At the same time Henry Constable challenged the same in *A Discovery of a Counterfeit Conference* (1600). He explains how, “in most nations of the world, the people have lost all power of election; and succession is firmly settled in one descent, as before I have declared” (Carroll 204). James’ transition from the Scottish to the English throne was therefore troubled and conflict-ridden.

4.6 THE WITCHES IN *MACBETH*

Some of the most intriguing characters in *Macbeth* have been the witches. They have of course drawn a lot of attention. Early criticism has looked at them in terms of the influence of the evil forces and it has only with attempts to historicise them that the witches have been looked at as real beings. Recent critical inputs have helped understand them in the context of the debates around witchcraft. Before we analyse the witches as characters in *Macbeth* it is important to understand the nature of these debates around witches and witchcraft.

4.6.1 Debates around witches and witchcraft

The sixteenth century held particularly strong views regarding witches and they were fiercely condemned. Witch trials and executions were prevalent. The St. Osyth witch trials of 1582 and the North Berwick trials of 1591 are instances of the seriousness with which the monarch looked at the world of witchcraft. In 1563, Elizabeth passed a statute against witchcraft. Scotland also passed an act against witchcraft at the same time. This Act was introduced as a new statute again in 1604 by King James I. The Act stated:

That if any person or persons, after the said Feast of St. Michael the Archangell next comming, shall use, practise, or exercise any invocation or conjuration of any evil and wicked spirit: or shall consult, covenant with, entertaine, imploy, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit, to or for any intent or pupose; or take up any dead man, woman, or child, out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth; or the skin, bone, or any other part of any dead person, to be imployed, or used in any manner of Witchcraft, Sorcery, Charme, or Inchantment, or shall use, practise, or exercise, any Witchcraft, Incantment, Charme or Sorcery, whereby any person shall be Killed, Destroyed, Wasted, Consumed, Pined, or Lamed, in His or Her body, or any part therof; that then every such Offender, or Offenders, their Ayders, Abettors, and Counsellors, being of the said offences duly and lawfully Convicted and Attainted, shall suffer paines of death as a Felon or Felons, and shall lose the priviledge and benefit of Clergy and Sanctuary. (Newton, John and Jo Bath *Witchcraft and the Act of 1604: Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions*. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008. 238)

Queen Elizabeth passed the Act in 1563 and King James I brought it back (encompassing a broader range of offenses” in 1604. This Act was finally revoked in 1736. Note that as per the Act, anyone who even invokes, consult or even covenants with the witches is liable to be punished. The Act reflected people’s belief in the supernatural and the world of witchcraft. The Acts passed by both the monarchs is an indication of their views on witchcraft.

The possible source texts for *Macbeth* mention the witches in different ways. John Major makes no mention of the witches and Buchanan talks of them as part of a dream. Holinshed’s *Chronicles* describes the meeting between Macbeth and the “weird sisters.” (See Illustration-1). Faith Nostbakken points out how Holinshed in the historical narrative of King Duff ‘s reign in Scotland “tells of rebels attempting to overthrow the king by seeking assistance from witches who are discovered one night secretly burning a wax image of the king and chanting incantations to try to destroy him through the power of evil spirits” (84). According to Nostbakken, Holinshed provides two contrasting views to the witches—the weird sisters are really “three goddesses with supernatural powers over human beings”, but Renaissance England with its belief on demons saw the witches as related to them. Are they the goddesses of destiny or do they signify demons? King James adopted a clear position and condemned them as evil in *Daemonologie* (1597). (See Illustration-2). But Reginald Scot dismissed this as superstition in *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584). The witches in *Macbeth* must be read against such sixteenth century debates that surrounded witchcraft. Scot wrote his book two years after the St. Osyth trials in which six were women were condemned to execution. In his book, Reginald Scot presents the witches as:

...women which be commonly old, lame, blear-eyed, pale, foul, and full of wrinkles; poor, sullen, superstitious and papists; or such as know no religion: in whose drowsy minds the devil hath gotten a fine seat; so as, what mischief, mischance, calamity, or slaughter is brought to pass, they are easily persuaded the same is done by themselves...They are lean and deformed, showing melancholy in their faces, to the horror of all that see them” (308).

To this he adds:

But whatsoever is reported or conceived of such manner of witchcrafts, I dare avow to be false and fabulous (cozenage, dotage and poisoning excepted): neither is there any mention made of these kind of witches in the Bible (Carroll 309).

In short, Scot sees them as old women, poor women and rejects any Biblical mention of the same. King James' concerns about witchcraft were well known. Scotland was more severe in its treatment of witchcraft. As a result the laws were implemented with greater severity. The Scottish Witchcraft Act was passed in 1563 and according to it those people were punished who invoked the witches for any purpose. The North Berwick trials of 1591 accused a group of people for plotting against the king. After the North Berwick trial and its relation to the plot against the monarch, King James took a stricter stance towards witchcraft in *Daemonologie*:

The fearful abounding at this time in this country, of these detestable slaves of the Devil, the witches, or enchanters, hath moved me to dispatch in this post, the following treatise of mine, not in any wise (as I protest) to serve for a show of my learning and ingine, but only (moved of conscience) to press thereby, so far as I can, to resolve the doubting hearts of many; both that such assaults of Satan are most certainly practised, and that the instruments thereof, merits most severely to be punished. (Carroll 325-326)

It is to be noted that the book was republished when James took over as monarch of England. The revision of the act and the re-publication of the text indicate the insecurities of the monarch regarding resistance especially through any alternative worldview. One can say that the witches are marked by a rebellious attitude that disturbs the monarch.

It is clear from these divergent attitudes to the 'witches' that there were people like Scot who saw witchcraft as "false and fabulous". And there was the monarch, be it Elizabeth or James, who reinforced belief in witches only to castigate them. In doing so, they created a polarity between the world of good as run by them and the world of evil of the witches that deserved to be punished. It is therefore not surprising that the sixteenth century is known for trials and subsequent execution of the witches. These were mostly women.

Illustration-1

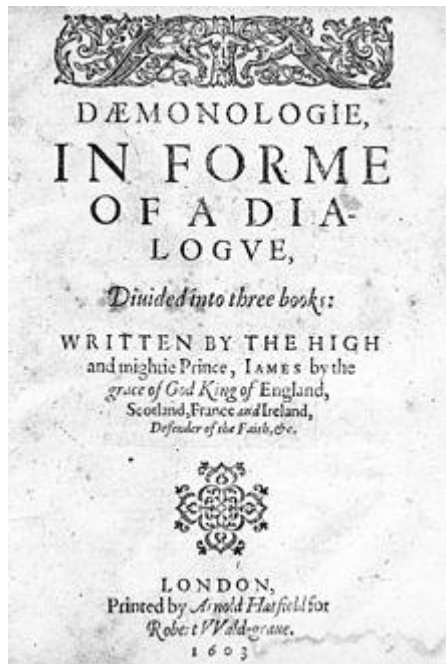


Macbeth and Banquo encountering the witches from Holinshed's Chronicles (1587)

(Source:

http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/84/Macbeth_and_Banquo_encountering_the_witches_-_Holinshed_Chronicles.gif)

Illustration-2



Title page of a 1603 reprinting of *Daemonologie*

(Source:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/7/79/James_I%3B_Daemonologie%2C_in_forme_of_a_dialogue._Title_page._Wellcome_M0014280.jpg/220px-James_I%3B_Daemonologie%2C_in_forme_of_a_dialogue._Title_page._Wellcome_M0014280.jpg)

4.6.2 Terry Eagleton: “The Witches Are the Heroine of the Piece” (1986)

Eagleton analyses the context of the witches in *Macbeth*. According to Eagleton the real heroines of the play are the witches. He associates them with a “positive value” as he calls them, “Exiles from that violent order, inhabiting their own sisterly community on its shadowy borderlands, refusing all truck with its tribal bickerings and military honours’. The “riddling ambiguous speech” by the witches is another instance of their subversion of the structure of power. In that sense, the witches are considered by the critic to be the “unconscious’ of the drama” (211-212). Posing a threat to the normative society, this power needs to be repressed even as the possibility of its return remains a vital one. This argument is in line with our discussion of witches and witchcraft in terms of the debates and texts around it. They challenge the monarch’s power and the ones in power exercise control through legislation; the passing of an Act. In trying to quell these forces, the monarch’s ‘writing’ tries to contain the domain of witches and witchcraft.

Eagleton foregrounds these women as “androgynous (bearded women), multiple (three-in-one) and ‘imperfect speakers’. They undermine the “stable social, sexual and linguistic forms” which is essential for the working of the world in the play and even outside it. Take a look at the following lines by Eagleton:

Their words and bodies mock rigorous boundaries and make sport of fixed positions, unhinging received meanings as they dance, dissolve and re-materialise. But official society can only ever imagine its radical ‘other’ as chaos rather than creativity, and is thus bound to define the sisters as evil. Foulness—a political order which thrives on bloodshed—believes itself fair, whereas the witches do not so much invert this opposition as invert *it*”. (Nagpal, Payal. Ed. *William Shakespeare: Macbeth*. New Delhi: Worldview P, 2016. 213)

Eagleton traces the transgression by the Macbeths within history and the subversive nature of the witches within cyclical time. The use of the moon, dance, verbal repetition is seen as “inimical to linear history”.

For the critic, the witches know no narrative. Applying the logic of Marxism to the witches, Eagleton feels that once their energy is placed within the political context, it becomes a “freedom which remains enslaved to the imperative of power” and thus reproduces the same “oppressive law”. As a result when Macbeth kills Duncan he attacks the body politic as also his own life. As a result, the Macbeths are “torn apart”. But the witches are “mutable” and do not experience this kind of disintegration.

See Illustrations 3, 4 and 5 for an understanding of the way the witches in *Macbeth* have been depicted in visual art.

The Case of Lady Macbeth

In the play, Lady Macbeth instigates Macbeth to become a man by killing Duncan and claiming his due on the grounds of valour. As a woman character situated in the sixteenth century, Lady Macbeth can realise her ambition only viz-a-viz her husband. If Macbeth claims the throne, then in the process, Lady Macbeth too makes a ‘strange’ narrative of her own. She uses one that does not follow the syntax of normative society. The freedom in choice of words that she makes her own is only seen in the supernatural world of the witches. It is therefore no surprise that she has often been called the fourth witch. In studying the character of Lady Macbeth we need to understand her class concerns as also her use of language.

Terry Eagleton interprets Lady Macbeth in the following manner:

Like most of Shakespeare’s villains, in short, Lady Macbeth is a bourgeois individualist for whom traditional ties of rank and kinship are less constitutive of personal identity than mere obstacles to be surmounted in the pursuit of one’s private ends.(213-214)

Would it be correct to use the term “bourgeois individualist” for Lady Macbeth? To understand this, we need to place her character against a combination of changing gender and class discourses of the time. This was a world that was increasingly more mercantile than before, even as it continued under a monarch. It leads well into the Cromwellian period where the monarch has been executed and the republic established. This became possible with a group of traders and merchants becoming more important in the seventeenth century. To call Lady Macbeth a “bourgeois individualist” would then be appropriate. It is a world in which people are driven by their desires to acquire personal benefit. But in doing so they also flout the existing social mores. Lady Macbeth in her desire for power subverts the deterministic structures of the time. Boundaries have to be redrawn to accommodate personal interest. She can realise her ambition only as Macbeth seizes the crown. As Eagleton points out,

Lady Macbeth is akin to the three sisters in celebrating female power, but in modern parlance, she is a ‘bourgeois’ feminist who strives to outdo in domination and virility the very male system which subordinates her. Even so, it is hard to see why her bloodthirsty talk of dashing out babies’ brains is any more ‘unnatural’ than skewering an enemy soldier’s guts.

The world of violence, the unnatural is located well within the natural. It signals a world that is changing.

Illustration-3



Macbeth in the Witches' Cave by Henry Fuseli 1793

(Source:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/24/Macbeth_consulting_the_Vision_of_the_Armed_Head.jpg/170px-Macbeth_consulting_the_Vision_of_the_Armed_Head.jpg)

Illustration 4



Macbeth and Banquo with the witches by Henry Fuseli

(Source:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/a/a5/Macbeth_and_Banquo_with_the_witches_JHF.jpg/220px-Macbeth_and_Banquo_with_the_witches_JHF.jpg)

Illustration-5



Theodore Chasseriau: Macbeth and Banquo meeting the witches on the heath
(Source: <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/50/MacbethAndBanquo-Witches.jpg>)
Musée d'Orsay 1855

4.7 ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND

Another important perspective in analysing *Macbeth* critically is to look at it in terms of the tension between England and Scotland. By now, the dynamic of power must have become quite clear to you given that the play is set in Scotland and not in England. King James I united the thrones of Scotland and England. One can mark how the play negotiates between the two countries given the common perception of Scotland as feudal and England as showing the way ahead. In the play too, Macbeth creates anarchy in Scotland and it is a visit to England and exposure to King Edward the healer that the way ahead can be seen. Meanwhile it is of some use to look at the different perceptions of these two countries.

The perception of Scotland in the English mind was constructed in terms of a polarity with Scotland as feudal and rustic, and a difficult terrain. England was seen as more civilised in comparison to its neighbour. James VI was the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, and a Catholic who had unsuccessfully plotted the death of Elizabeth. She was executed in 1587. This meant that the relation between these two countries would have been strained. It also meant that James' claim to the English throne was not a natural one and could be contested. In short, the relation between England and Scotland was a complex one. This carried into common cultural perceptions as well. As Carroll points out:

English attitudes towards Scotland in the late sixteenth century were mixed, of course, but certainly anti-Scottish discourse pre-dominated...[It] comprised of maps, legends, unreliable histories, and occasionally, narratives of travellers who had actually gone to Scotland. Much of the English attitude, it seems, derived from the English project of nation-building and self-definition. (Carroll, William C. *Macbeth: Texts and Contexts*. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. 272).

One can see that the tension between the two nations would have taken a new form in the situation that James was to be the successor to the English throne. This would have been a matter of debate and discussion. But as James's ascent united the English and Scottish throne these views would have surely found creative representation. In setting the play in Scotland and presenting the English as a constructive ally to the Scots, Shakespeare is certainly raising complex issues.

4.8 LET US SUM UP

This unit would have given you a fair idea of the different trends in criticism on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* from the eighteenth century onwards. Today, we might base our understanding of the Bard's plays on current trends in literary criticism. But it is the legacy of Shakespearean criticism over the years that has led to debates and discussion of ideas brought out in the play.

4.9 GLOSSARY

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|------------------------------|---|
| Machiavellian: | The influence of Machiavelli's views expressed in <i>The Prince</i> . In it the strategy to be adopted by the usurper has been discussed. |
| Imagination: | The early nineteenth century privileged the faculty of imagination as against the idea of reason in the eighteenth century. |
| Normative: | The norms of the society formed by the dominant social group. |
| Culture: | in Marxist criticism, as per the base-superstructure model, culture is a part of the superstructure. |
| New Historicist: | This way of thinking combined the presence of cultural texts, visual art and other mediums to study a text of the period. |
| Cultural Materialism: | It combined a view to the hierarchies in society with the idea of culture and represented the point of view of marginal social groups. |

4.10 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the key aspects of criticism on *Macbeth* in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
2. Critically analyse Lady Macbeth as the fourth witch.
3. How do you interpret the role of the witches in *Macbeth*?
4. What were the different perceptions of the English about Scotland?
5. Analyse *Macbeth* from the point of view of Marxism.

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