

SCENE I. Court of Macbeth's castle.

Enter BANQUO, and FLEANCE bearing a torch before him

BANQUO

How goes the night, boy?

FLEANCE

The moon is down; I have not heard the clock.

BANQUO

And she goes down at twelve.

FLEANCE

I take't, 'tis later, sir.

BANQUO

Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven;

Their candles are all out. Take thee that too.

A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,

And yet I would not sleep: merciful powers,

Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature

Gives way to in repose!

Enter MACBETH, and a Servant with a torch

Give me my sword.

Who's there?

MACBETH

A friend.

BANQUO

What, sir, not yet at rest? The king's a-bed:

He hath been in unusual pleasure, and

Sent forth great largess to your offices.

This diamond he greets your wife withal,

By the name of most kind hostess; and shut up

In measureless content.

MACBETH

Being unprepared,

Our will became the servant to defect;

Which else should free have wrought.

The weaponry imagery used here emphasises the violence and war themes in 'Macbeth'. This also foreshadows Banquo's later appeal for his son to avenge his death.

Links to the theme of light / dark. This lack of light (used to symbolise goodness) foreshadows the death of the virtuous and rightful King Duncan.

Banquo uses a simile to express his feelings of fatigue and weakness.

Banquo has been troubled by nightmares. In Jacobean England, it was believed that bad dreams were caused by demons, and so Banquo prays to the "merciful powers" of heaven to relieve him of this. Sleep is symbolic of peace; however, Banquo is clearly troubled by his meeting with the Witches and therefore has trouble sleeping.

This moment in which Banquo so very nearly draws his sword on a potential intruder - which turns out to be Macbeth - is an example of dramatic irony. This is because Banquo, unlike the audience, is naive to Macbeth's sinister plans. Unbeknownst to Banquo, he has every right to be threatened by the appearance of Macbeth.

An ironic statement considering Macbeth's hand in Banquo's murder later in the play.

The fact that Banquo questions the strangeness of Macbeth being awake at such a late hour suggests that he could be suspicious of his actions. His words also foreshadow Macbeth's own inability to sleep following his act of regicide.

Again, Banquo's words are deeply ironic, as he comments upon how remarkably happy Duncan is, unaware of Macbeth's intentions. His mention of Duncan's generosity also emphasizes Duncan's kind and generous nature - something which causes Macbeth's actions to be even more shocking.

One might assume that this means Banquo realizes that Macbeth is planning to murder King Duncan. But Banquo might not yet fully grasp Macbeth's plans: the "truth" they have so far "show'd" to Macbeth is his promotion to the thane of Cawdor. It is unclear if Banquo truly understands that further predictions are about to come true.

Although he is not yet King, Macbeth uses the royal "we" to refer to himself. This illustrates his ambition to become King. The royal 'we' is commonly employed by a person of high office, meaning 'myself and God'. This links to the Jacobean belief in the Divine Right of Kings, namely that the King was chosen by God Himself and that he was therefore his voice upon earth.

By reiterating his desire to keep a clear conscience Banquo sets himself apart from Macbeth. Unlike his friend, Banquo is not willing to act immorally.

The appearance of the dagger is ambiguous., Macbeth could be hallucinating the dagger, something which would suggest mental instability. Alternatively, if the dagger is indeed real, this can be viewed as an element of the supernatural. This duality reflects Macbeth's own internal battle between his ambition and morality. Just as nature is chaotic when the normal natural order is disrupted, Macbeth's own mind does the same when it is forced to fight against itself.

In his soliloquy, Macbeth seems to suspect that what he is seeing is not real, much as Banquo asks regarding the Witches in Act 1 Scene 3 ("Or have we eaten on the insane root [...]"). Hallucinations would have been believed to be evidence of supernatural intervention.

BANQUO
All's well.
I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters:
To you they have show'd some truth.

MACBETH
I think not of them:
Yet, when we can entreat an hour to serve,
We would spend it in some words upon that business,
If you would grant the time.

BANQUO
At your kind'st leisure.

MACBETH
If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,
It shall make honour for you.

BANQUO
So I lose none
In seeking to augment it, but still keep
My bosom franchised and allegiance clear,
I shall be counsell'd.

MACBETH
Good repose the while!

BANQUO
Thanks, sir: the like to you!
Exeunt BANQUO and FLEANCE

MACBETH
Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready,
She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed.
Exit Servant
Is this a dagger which I see before me,
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

Like Macbeth, Banquo seems to be preoccupied with the Witches and the prophesies that they have both been given. This could suggest that Banquo, much like Macbeth, is equally as ambitious but does not intend (or perhaps does not get the opportunity) to act

Dramatic irony. Macbeth, along with the audience, are aware that this is a lie and that Macbeth has indeed been thinking very deeply of the prophesies of the Witches. In fact, it is their predictions which have spurred him into action.

Macbeth intentionally speaks in ambiguous terms. He wants to allude to his deed but does not want to arouse suspicion.

This is one of many examples of equivocation— a major theme in the play.

The use of the imperative verb 'come' is evidence of Macbeth's feelings of power and control.

Macbeth first responds to the vision analytically; his explanation is physiological but descends away from the rational and towards the supernatural by the end of the soliloquy.

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' the 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 halfworld

Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse

The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates

Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,

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.

Exit

Blood is used as a symbol of guilt and violence throughout the play. The fact that Macbeth sees the bloody dagger in front of him foreshadows both the murder of King Duncan and Macbeth's feelings of remorse.

Macbeth does not name the act directly, perhaps showing an awareness of the severity and immorality of what he plans to do. The use of alliterative, plosive 'b's highlight Macbeth's feelings of frustration and determination.

"Curtain'd sleep" in this context is a double entendre that plays upon the literal meaning of bedcurtains and a more figurative meaning of "veiled" that suggests hidden from consciousness.

Here, Macbeth compares himself to the Tarquin out to defile the sleeping and unaware Duncan.

Bells are rung at the stroke of midnight and at dawn. Here, the bell signifies Duncan's death, and foreshadows the shift in Scotland from a state of natural order to unnatural chaos.

Note the wordplay here with "instrument". Macbeth acknowledges that the imagined dagger resembles the real thing ("in form as palpable/as this which now I draw') as if his hallucination is predicting his motives, but the instrument in this instance might also refer to Macbeth himself, merely an instrument in the regicidal murder scheme.

"Nature seems dead" refers to the effect of night and darkness, the silence of the night; metaphorically, Macbeth might also be referring to human nature. Again, 'wicked dreams' or nightmares are once again used symbolically to suggest guilt and immorality.

Hecate is the goddess of night and witchcraft. The main image here is of witches performing sacrifices to Hecate during the night. This foreshadows Macbeth's encounter with the Witches and Hecate in Act 4 Scene 1.

The juxtaposition between "heat" and "cold" mirrors Macbeth's conflicted feelings here – namely guilt and ambition.

The bell is a signal for Macbeth to move toward Duncan's room and commit the murder, and it symbolizes the call to death, the summoning of King Duncan to his grave.

Note that Macbeth uses a rhyming couplet to finish his soliloquy. This is reminiscent of the speech patterns of the Witches and would signify their supernatural influence over Macbeth.