

ACT V SCENE III. Dunsinane. A room in the castle.

Macbeth repeats the Witches' prophecy that he will not be defeated until Birnam Wood moves to his castle—a seeming impossibility. Here we see how Macbeth's hubris is one of his fatal flaws, he believes himself to be invincible.

The use of "taint" here is ironic as "taint" suggests something has been corrupted. Macbeth at this point is perhaps as corrupted as one could be. This shows the audience that he is still in denial of his guilt.

Again, his words are deeply ironic as he accuses the thanes of being "false" (disloyal), when it is in fact he who betrayed King Duncan.

Macbeth ends his dramatic monologue with a rhyming couplet summarising his feelings of invulnerability. His use of sibilance also gives a hissing, eerie quality to his words.

Here we see bird imagery, linking to Macbeth's soaring ambition and pride. His direct and disparaging questioning is yet another reflection of his overconfidence and tyrannical nature.

Enter MACBETH, Doctor, and Attendants

MACBETH

Bring me no more reports; let them fly all:  
Till Birnam wood remove to Dunsinane,

I cannot taint with fear. What's the boy Malcolm?  
Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know  
All mortal consequences have pronounced me thus:

'Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of woman  
Shall e'er have power upon thee.' Then fly,

false thanes,

And mingle with the English epicures:  
The mind I sway by and the heart I bear

Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear.

Enter a Servant

The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!  
Where got'st thou that goose look?

Servant

There is ten thousand—

MACBETH

Geese, villain!

Servant

Soldiers, sir.

MACBETH

Go prick thy face, and over-red thy fear,  
Thou lily-liver'd boy. What soldiers, patch?  
Death of thy soul! those linen cheeks of thine  
Are counsellors to fear. What soldiers, whey-face?

Malcolm refers to Malcolm as "boy", belittling his authority and power. The use of this belittling phrase could relate to the third apparition (a child crowned with a tree in hand.)

Macbeth's use of the rhetorical question shows his faith in "the spirits". He trusts in them above all else as they "know all moral consequences".

Macbeth directly quotes the Witches. The phrase "Fear not" is ironic as it suggests that Macbeth does not need to confront his wrongdoings due to his supposed immortality, something which later proves to be false.

This shows a type of irony as Macbeth uses these epithets, which have previously been used to describe him ("Devilish Macbeth", "Deep damnation of hell") to curse his servant. This further shows Macbeth as a tyrannical figure as he expresses his anger to an innocent servant.

Macbeth interrupts the servant, showing his impatience. His response is sarcastic and illustrates how he treats the impacting threat of the enemy with flippancy.

"whey-face" continues the motif of milk. Throughout this play, milk (and associated ideas such as cream or whey) is associated with nurture, gentleness, femininity – and to someone like Lady Macbeth, those traits need to be removed before she can be filled "with direst cruelty" and not be "too full of the milk of human kindness" as she perceives Macbeth to be. Here, Macbeth taunts this soldier by using comparisons to milk, suggesting that his face, pale with fear, is so because the soldier is weak and therefore associated with childishness and effeminacy.

Servant

The English force, so please you.

Macbeth's repetition of the name of his servant shows not only his impatience but his declining control and authority. He is no longer attended to instantly, giving the impression to the Jacobean audience that despite his hubris, he has very few supporters.

MACBETH

Take thy face hence.

Exit Servant

Seyton!--I am sick at heart,

When I behold--Seyton, I say!--This push

Will cheer me ever, or disseat me now.

I have lived long enough: my way of life

Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf;

And that which should accompany old age,

As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,

I must not look to have; but, in their stead,

Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,

Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not. Seyton!

Macbeth's nihilistic tone clearly foreshadows his eventual demise. He pictures his life now as a dried "yellow leaf" (symbolic of Autumn and the ending of years), and knows that he will never have the comforts that often accompany old age such as "honour, love, obedience," This is ironic, as these are the things that he has lost due to his sinful actions. Instead of those rewards he expects hostile "curses" – not shouted loudly, but muttered angrily and secretly, and felt "deep[ly]." Instead of real honour, he'll get "mouth-honour,". This links to the theme of appearances v reality, he worries that others will, as he himself did, appear to be loyal and secretly plot against him.

Enter SEYTON

SEYTON

What is your gracious pleasure?

MACBETH

What news more?

We once again see "brave Macbeth" reported in A1S2, however he is no longer fighting for the good of his country but for his own personal gain and to maintain his power. His use of violent vivid imaginary foreshadows the coming battle.

SEYTON

All is confirm'd, my lord, which was reported.

MACBETH

I'll fight till from my bones my flesh be hack'd.

Give me my armour.

SEYTON

'Tis not needed yet.

Macbeth does not heed the advice of Seyton, suggesting that he is truly “bloody, bold, and resolute” as the second apparition demanded (A4S1). His paranoia is shown through his haste to wear his armour – he wishes to be ready for the battle to come. He also uses hyperbole, telling Seyton to “hang those that talk of fear” – demonstrating not only his growing impatience but his brutal nature.

Once again, his response is flippant. He shows no concern for her wellbeing, nor does he ask for any more details regarding her physical or mental state.

The doctor’s response is much more pointed this time: in cases such as this, the patient “must minister to himself”, “minister” conveying both self-attendance and the implied need for spiritual absolution. The suggestion is that the kind of illness that afflicts Lady Macbeth (and by association, Macbeth himself) is well beyond the scope of ‘physic’ medicine, and rather the product of a conscience guilty before God.

Macbeth uses the language of medicine to express his desire that Scotland, like an afflicted patient, be “purged” to a “sound and pristine health”. The deep irony in this is that it can: Macbeth is the disease, and his death will be the purification of a blighted Scotland. Also note that in the previous scene Malcolm and the English talked of curing Scotland of Macbeth (“To give...the medicine of the sickly weal”).

MACBETH

I'll put it on.

Send out more horses; skirr the country round;

Hang those that talk of fear. Give me mine armour.

How does your patient, doctor?

Doctor

Not so sick, my lord,

As she is troubled with thick coming fancies,

That keep her from her rest.

MACBETH

Cure her of that.

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,

Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,

Raze out the written troubles of the brain

And with some sweet oblivious antidote

Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff

Which weighs upon the heart?

Doctor

Therein the patient

Must minister to himself.

MACBETH

Throw physic to the dogs; I'll none of it.

Come, put mine armour on; give me my staff.

Seyton, send out. Doctor, the thanes fly from me.

Come, sir, dispatch. If thou couldst, doctor, cast

The water of my land, find her disease,

And purge it to a sound and pristine health,

I would applaud thee to the very echo,

That should applaud again.--Pull't off, I say.--

What rhubarb, cyme, or what purgative drug,

Would scour these English hence? Hear'st thou of them?

Macbeth does not refer to Lady Macbeth by name, or even as wife, this suggests a growing emotional distance between the couple. This is juxtaposed with A1S5, in which he refers to her as “my dearest partner in greatness”. It seems that Lady Macbeth’s significance to him has diminished now that he is no longer in need of her advise and commands.

Here the Doctor speaks euphemistically; he dares not speak what he suspects is true: that she is plagued by the memories of real murderers.

Macbeth is ostensibly asking the doctor to cure Lady Macbeth, but we understand that his plea has a deeper motivation, for both Macbeths are plagued by this “brain sickly” state, and Macbeth is just as concerned with his own spiritual corruption. The key to these lines are the verbs: minister, pluck, raze, cleanse. He asks: is there not some tangible cure to this intangible suffering?

Macbeth, in a characteristically hyperbolic mood, damns medicine when the doctor fails to tell him what he wants to hear. He is spoiling for the fight he suspects will be the ‘be all and end all’, and now commits himself to one last violent course.

Doctor

Ay, my good lord; your royal preparation

Makes us hear something.

MACBETH

Bring it after me.

I will not be afraid of death and bane,  
Till Birnam forest come to Dunsinane.

Doctor

[Aside] Were I from Dunsinane away and clear,  
Profit again should hardly draw me here.

Exeunt

Macbeth continues to feel invincible – suggesting that he does not fear death. This contrasts with his fears in earlier scenes in which his acts were often based upon concealing his evil deeds in order to avoid punishment (which would have most certainly been death for the act of committing regicide). Here we see that Macbeth is now instead driven by his need to maintain his power.

The sentiments of the Doctor reflect those of many in Scotland and express to the Jacobean audience how little support Macbeth has and how far he has fallen.

The prophecy from A4S1 is again mentioned but not elaborated upon. This foreshadows events in later scenes and would increase the tension and anticipation of the Jacobean audience.