

ACT III SCENE I. Forres. The palace.

Enter BANQUO

BANQUO

Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the weird women promised, and, I fear,
Thou play'dst most foully for't: yet it was said

Banquo reflects that all of the Witches' prophecies have come true. Banquo also suspects that Macbeth fulfilled the Witches' prophecy by killing the king. His use of the word "foully" links to the Witches' use of the phrase "fair is foul, and foul is fair".

The Witches promised Banquo that he'd be father to many kings and that Macbeth, though he'd be king himself, would not establish a lineage of royalty.

It should not stand in thy posterity,

But that myself should be the root and father
Of many kings. If there come truth from them--

Verities: literally "truths"; Banquo is describing the Witches' accurate predictions for Macbeth's future, and speculating that they might turn out to be truths for him too.

Like Macbeth, Banquo is also shown to be ambitious, musing that the predictions of the Witches could also become true for him. However, unlike Macbeth he does not act upon these thoughts and instead cuts himself off.

As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine--

Why, by the verities on thee made good,

May they not be my oracles as well,

And set me up in hope? But hush! no more.

Sennet sounded. Enter MACBETH, as king, LADY MACBETH,
as queen, LENNOX, ROSS, Lords, Ladies, and Attendants

MACBETH

Here's our chief guest.

This reminds the audience of the murder of King Duncan. This was said to Duncan when he arrived at Macbeth's castle, and he was consequently murdered there. This is therefore an example of foreshadowing as it hints that Banquo may have the same fate.

LADY MACBETH

If he had been forgotten,
It had been as a gap in our great feast,
And all-thing unbecoming.

Lady Macbeth's words suggest a deep affection and respect for Banquo from both herself and her husband. However, we later learn that this is a falsehood. This links to the theme of appearances v reality – Lady Macbeth is speaking one sentiment whilst feeling another.

MACBETH

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

BANQUO

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

Macbeth's question is seemingly innocent, but his intentions will later become clear and reveal the significance of his confirmation of Banquo's plans.

MACBETH

Ride you this afternoon?

BANQUO

Ay, my good lord.

MACBETH

We should have else desired your good advice,
Which still hath been both grave and prosperous,
In this day's council; but we'll take to-morrow.

Macbeth informs Banquo that he would have liked to hear his advice that day, suggesting that he sees Banquo as level-headed and trustworthy. This however, is ironic as Macbeth refused to heed Banquo's earlier advise regarding the Witches – "and oftentimes, to win us to our harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths."

Again, Macbeth feigns friendly interest to find out Banquo's exact whereabouts. His actions show that he is indeed following his wife's earlier direction to "look like the innocent flower but be the serpent under it."

Is't far you ride?

BANQUO

As far, my lord, as will fill up the time

'Twixt this and supper: go not my horse the better,

I must become a borrower of the night

For a dark hour or twain.

Banquo is telling Macbeth that he has to go fulfil some obligations but will return after dark. Night and darkness are symbolic throughout the play and represent night and evil, especially the shrouding of evil deeds at night.

This foreshadows the events of Act 3 Scene 3 where Macbeth hires three murderers to murder Banquo. Macbeth knows that Banquo won't be at the feast as he will be dead. These words also foreshadow the ghost of Banquo's appearance at the feast.

MACBETH

Fail not our feast.

BANQUO

My lord, I will not.

Parricide: the act of killing one's father. Macbeth uses it metaphorically here to refer to Duncan, the King, as the father of his people.

MACBETH

We hear, our bloody cousins are bestow'd

In England and in Ireland, not confessing

Their cruel parricide, filling their hearers

Macbeth is referring to the sons of King Duncan. His use of the word "bloody" is ironic, as blood is used throughout the play to symbolise feelings of guilt, and it is in fact Macbeth himself who is guilty of the murder of which they are accused.

Malcolm and Donalbain are likely spreading the tale that they are innocent of their father's murder and spreading their own suspicions of who is responsible.

With strange invention: but of that to-morrow,

When therewithal we shall have cause of state

Craving us jointly. Hie you to horse: adieu,

Till you return at night. Goes Fleance with you?

Macbeth enquires as to if Banquo is taking his son with him. Again, this appears to be friendly questioning, but the real intentions behind his question only become clear later.

They likely suspect Macbeth, who had obvious motive and opportunity, so Macbeth plays their story off as "strange invention" to try to detract attention from it.

BANQUO

Ay, my good lord: our time does call upon 's.

MACBETH

I wish your horses swift and sure of foot;
And so I do commend you to their backs. Farewell.

Exit BANQUO

Let every man be master of his time
Till seven at night: to make society
The sweeter welcome, we will keep ourself
Till supper-time alone: while then, God be with you!

Exeunt all but MACBETH, and an attendant

Sirrah, a word with you: attend those men
Our pleasure?

ATTENDANT

They are, my lord, without the palace gate.

MACBETH

Bring them before us.

Exit Attendant

Macbeth feels that the power he has gained through the murder of King Duncan mean nothing if he is discovered. He suspects that Banquo may already suspect him of regicide. Macbeth also recognises and is threatened by Banquo's noble nature that garners a kind of reverence he could never muster.

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,

Macbeth again praises Banquo for his positive qualities (wisdom, bravery), but is these qualities that would make him a powerful enemy if he were to turn against Macbeth.

His inner psyche, or spirit, is afraid of Banquo, suggesting that he fears him deeply.

Banquo hadn't trusted the Witches and "chid" them (told them off) when they gave their prophecies to Macbeth, but when it was about him, he stopped.

Macbeth worries that he will have no children, and that his family will therefore not inherit the crown.

Macbeth can think of nothing else but the idea that Banquo will be the father of kings, not him. His words suggest that he feels the act of Murder was pointless, as having the crown is worthless if he cannot have his own children inherit.

My Genius is rebuked; 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 placed 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 filed 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 seed of Banquo kings!
 Rather than so, come fate into the list.
 And champion me to the utterance! Who's there!

Macbeth refers to Mark Antony creating a three-man dictatorship with Marcus Lepidus, another general, and Octavian Caesar, Julius Caesar's adopted son.

They formed the triumvirate after Julius Caesar's death. Lepidus was expelled in 36 BCE which left Mark Antony and Octavian Caesar in power. Because of the lust for full power, Octavian declared civil war against Antony and won, gaining the title Augustus, and reigning as the first Roman emperor.

Macbeth compares his fear here to what Mark Antony probably felt once Lepidus was expelled and he was left alone with Caesar.

Macbeth is angry that he has given his "eternal jewel" (his soul) to "the common enemy of man" (The Devil) by turning his back on God and committing regicide, only for Banquo to benefit.

Re-enter Attendant, with two Murderers

Now go to the door, and stay there till we call.

Exit Attendant

Was it not yesterday we spoke together?

First Murderer

It was, so please your highness.

Macbeth is attempting to persuade the murderers to kill Banquo by saying he was their enemy and the reason they suffered in the past.

This is ironic, as we know that Macbeth is far from innocent.

MACBETH
 Well then, now
 Have you consider'd of my speeches? Know
 That it was he in the times past which held you
 So 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 crazed
Say 'Thus did Banquo.'

First Murderer

You made it known to us.

MACBETH

I did so, and went further, which is now
Our point of second meeting. Do you find
Your patience so predominant in your nature
That you can let this go? Are you so gospell'd
To pray for this good man and for his issue,
Whose heavy hand hath bow'd you to the grave
And beggar'd yours for ever?

This means are you so brainwashed (imbued with a gospel spirit) that you would pray for Banquo and his son (Fleance), when he has wronged you and impoverished you and your family? – Use of rhetorical questions.

This links to the theme of gender roles. In Jacobean England, men were stereotypically brave and violent, Macbeth is playing on this idea in order to manipulate the murderers into agreeing to his plan.

First Murderer

We are men, my liege.

MACBETH

Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men;
As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
Shoughs, water-rugs and demi-wolves, are clept
All by the name of dogs: the valued file
Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,
The housekeeper, the hunter, every one
According to the gift which bounteous nature
Hath in him closed; whereby he does receive
Particular addition. from the bill
That writes them all alike: and so of men.
Now, if you have a station in the file,
Not i' the worst rank of manhood, say 't;
And I will put that business in your bosoms,

Macbeth continues to question the Murders' masculinity. He says that yes, they are men but that there are many different types of men, just as there are many different types of dogs with different characteristics and abilities.

Macbeth is saying that everyone in life is in a file, just as dogs are in a catalogue. He uses animal imagery to explain this.

He suggests that humans, just like dogs, all have their place and rank. He tells the murderers that right now they are in the lowest rank but if they kill Banquo, he can raise them up.

Macbeth also plays on their loyalty, telling them that whilst Banquo is alive, he (Macbeth) is sick, and that by killing Banquo they would make him well again.

Whose execution takes your enemy off,
Grapples you to the heart and love of us,
Who wear our health but sickly in his life,
Which in his death were perfect.

Second Murderer

I am one, my liege,
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Have so incensed that I am reckless what
I do to spite the world.

First Murderer

The murderer tells Macbeth that he is so sick of bad luck and trouble that he'd risk his life on any bet, if it would either fix his life or end it once and for all.

And I another
So weary with disasters, tugg'd with fortune,
That I would set my lie on any chance,
To mend it, or be rid on't.

MACBETH

Both of you
Know Banquo was your enemy.

Both Murderers

True, my lord.

MACBETH

So is he mine; and in such bloody distance,
That every minute of his being thrusts
Against my near'st of life: and though I could
With barefaced power sweep him from my sight
And bid my will avouch it, yet I must not,
For certain friends that are both his and mine,
Whose loves I may not drop, but wail his fall
Who I myself struck down; and thence it is,
That I to your assistance do make love,
Masking the business from the common eye

Macbeth tells the murderers that he could easily kill Banquo himself, but that they have friends in common whom he can't afford to anger ("whose loves I may not drop"), so he needs them to murder him in his stead. Here we see the theme of appearances v reality- Macbeth is concerned with how others will view him if he murdered such a noble and respected man such as Banquo, and therefore needs others to do it for him.

For sundry weighty reasons.

Second Murderer

We shall, my lord,

Perform what you command us.

First Murderer

Though our lives—

MACBETH

The murderer's "though" in the previous line implies that he is feeling doubt about killing Banquo, or possibly he is boasting that he and his companion will fulfil the task "though" their lives will be at risk (Banquo is a mighty warrior, after all). Macbeth interrupts him and praises the two murderers highly to keep them from changing their minds—their souls "shine" so brightly with the virtue of their unwavering loyalty to his violent commands.

Your spirits shine through you. Within this hour at most

I will advise you where to plant yourselves;
Acquaint you with the perfect spy o' the time,
The moment on't; for't must be done to-night,
And something from the palace; always thought

That I require a clearness: and with him--
To leave no rubs nor botches in the work--
Fleance his son, that keeps him company,
Whose absence is no less material to me

Than is his father's, must embrace the fate

Of that dark hour. Resolve yourselves apart:

I'll come to you anon.

Both Murderers

We are resolved, my lord.

MACBETH

I'll call upon you straight: abide within.

Exeunt Murderers

It is concluded. Banquo, thy soul's flight,
If it find heaven, must find it out to-night.

Exit

Macbeth informs the murderers that Banquo and his son must be killed tonight, and that they must ensure that no evidence will be left of the murder. He also informs them that the murder of Fleance is just as important as that of Banquo. His urgency to see the deed done suggests that Macbeth is significantly concerned about what Banquo may suspect and wishes to silence him swiftly.

As if to impress us with the connection between the killing of the king and the killing of Banquo, the scene ends with a final rhyming couplet. This ironically recalls the words spoken by Macbeth immediately prior to his killing of King Duncan: "Hear it not Duncan, for it is a bell / That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell."

Here Macbeth makes up his mind to kill Banquo.