

ACT V SCENE VIII. Another part of the field.

Refers to the ancient Roman practice of suicide via sword, usually in a situation of forced suicide or suicide to preserve one's honour. This practice is the origin of the modern figurative expression "fall on your sword," meaning to offer your resignation or take the fall in a bad situation.

Enter MACBETH

MACBETH
Why should I play the Roman fool, and die
On mine own sword? whiles I see lives, the gashes
Do better upon them.

The assonance of "whiles" "I" and "lives" give the sense of the sharp action of this scene.

This is a zoomorphic metaphor. Once again, Macbeth is addressed using the semantic field of hell to highlight his wicked and corrupt nature.

Enter MACDUFF

MACDUFF
Turn, hell-hound, turn!

Macduff's lack of faith in words is in stark contrast to Macbeth, who has spent the entire play bewitched by either the Witches' promises or the arguments of his wife and often articulated his thoughts and feelings through dramatic

MACBETH
Of all men else I have avoided thee:
But get thee back; my soul is too much charged
With blood of thine already.

Macbeth is undoubtedly conscious of his own great guilt (after the murder of King Duncan) and does not wish to add the death of Macduff along with his wife and children. The reference to his "charged [...] soul" is a reference to how Macbeth has altered throughout the play, and that the "blood" (symbolic of guilt) of those he has murdered has impacted upon his ability to enter Heaven.

MACDUFF

I have no words:
My voice is in my sword: thou bloodier villain
Than terms can give thee out!

Macbeth is referring to the Witches' prophecies. He is filled with overconfidence that he sees himself fearless and that no one can harm him. He has a lot of trust and faith in the Witches as he believes their word. This statement of overconfidence is used in order to make the final revelation that the Witches' have tricked him all the more shocking and impactful for both Macbeth and the Jacobean audience.

They fight

MACBETH

Thou lovest labour:
As easy mayst thou the intrenchant air
With thy keen sword impress as make me bleed:
Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield,
To one of woman born.

Another reference to the prophecies of the Witches in A4S1. The use of the word "charmed" reflects Macbeth's belief in his own protection and his association with supernatural forces.

MACDUFF

Despair thy charm;
And let the angel whom thou still hast served
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripp'd.

Macduff was born via C-Section. He was not technically born from a woman, and thus fulfils the prophecy. The equivocation used in the Witches' prophecy is that "born" is a verb (Macduff's mother did not actively give birth but had her son removed by a surgeon), rather than an adjective describing Macduff (a man who was born). This line marks the climax of the play and the point of realisation for both Macbeth and Jacobean audience that Macbeth should indeed "beware Macduff" (A4S1).

"Juggle" in this sense means "to use artifice or trickery". In Jacobean England, it was believed that Witches often used trickery and equivocation – a view expressed by Banquo in A1S3: "And oftentimes, to win us to our harm, the instruments of darkness tell us truths". In A1S3, he called them "imperfect speakers" because they had not told him all he desired to know; now he realizes that they spoke to him of his own imperfection.

MACBETH

Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,
For it hath cow'd my better part of man!
And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense;
That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope. I'll not fight with thee.

MACDUFF

Then yield thee, coward,
And live to be the show and gaze o' the time:
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
Painted on a pole, and underwrit,
'Here may you see the tyrant.'

Macduff promises to have him publicly displayed — "baited with the rabble's curse" with a sign painted with the words "Here may you see the tyrant." His threat reflects Macbeth unnatural behaviour and he is therefore compared to something that might be displayed to be mocked.

Macbeth is refusing to acknowledge what is happening, especially because he is aware that when he is murdered, Malcolm will become the rightful king of Scotland. This highlights his character-defiant and arrogant and also links to the theme of fate v free will.

MACBETH
I will not yield,
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou opposed, being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff,
And damn'd be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'

Macbeth's over-confidence is inevitably what leads to his demise and this final scene represents everything that he has lost in his fight to gain and maintain power. He is alone and yet remains defiant until the end, fighting Malcolm with the knowledge that he will likely peril in the fight.

Exeunt, fighting. Alarums

Retreat. Flourish. Enter, with drum and colours, MALCOLM, SIWARD, ROSS, the other Thanes, and Soldiers

Siward explains how in most battles brave soldiers and warriors will die, but fortunately for Siward and Malcolm's army, they didn't lose too many men. This is an example of dramatic irony as we are aware that his own son has been murdered in battle by Macbeth.

MALCOLM
I would the friends we miss were safe arrived.

SIWARD
Some must go off: and yet, by these I see,
So great a day as this is cheaply bought.

MALCOLM
Macduff is missing, and your noble son.

This links to the theme of gender roles and Jacobean belief that a man should be fearless and brave in battle. As Young Siward has lost his life bravely fighting Macbeth he is seen as a "man" and remembered as such.

ROSS
Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier's debt:
He only lived but till he was a man;
The which no sooner had his prowess confirm'd
In the unshrinking station where he fought,
But like a man he died.

SIWARD
Then he is dead?

ROSS
Ay, and brought off the field: your cause of sorrow
Must not be measured by his worth, for then
It hath no end.

SIWARD
Had he his hurts before?

ROSS
Ay, on the front.

Unlike Macduff Siward is not outraged by the death of his son but rather proud of his actions. This would have reflected the Jacobean belief that to die in battle for one's country was an extremely honourable way to die and that by doing so you would be rewarded in Heaven for your sacrifice.

SIWARD
Why then, God's soldier be he!
Had I as many sons as I have hairs,
I would not wish them to a fairer death:
And so, his knell is knoll'd.

When Siward (the Earl of Northumberland) understands that his son was slain, he queries where he received the wounds – at the front or back of the body. The fact that he was found stabbed in the front, rather than the back, comforts him because it shows that Young Siward fought Macbeth head on and with bravery.

MALCOLM
He's worth more sorrow,
And that I'll spend for him.

This makes a cathartic and shocking moment within the play. Evil (represented by Macbeth) has indeed been defeated by good (represented by the rightful King Malcolm), something which would please the Jacobean audience. It also serves as a warning, signifying that any act of treason against the King will ultimately lead to death. The fact that Macbeth is killed in this way is a direct link to the beheading of The thane of Cawdor, meaning that the events in Macbeth are ultimately cylindrical (both finishing and ending with the beheading of a traitor).

By appointing his "thanes and kinsmen" as earls Malcolm begins to restore order to the chaos which Macbeth created.

Macbeth is again not named, but instead is referred to as a "butcher", a reflection upon his brutal and violent nature.

This final rhyming couplet provides a fairy-tale-like ending to the play, implying that Malcolm has restored peace in Scotland, and they will experience a time of prosperity under his rule.

SIWARD
He's worth no more
They say he parted well, and paid his score:
And so, God be with him! Here comes newer comfort.

Re-enter MACDUFF, with MACBETH's head

MACDUFF
Hail, king! for so thou art: behold, where stands
The usurper's cursed head: the time is free:
I see thee compass'd with thy kingdom's pearl,
That speak my salutation in their minds;
Whose voices I desire aloud with mine:
Hail, King of Scotland!

ALL
Hail, King of Scotland!

Flourish

MALCOLM
We shall not spend a large expense of time
Before we reckon with your several loves,
And make us even with you. My thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland
In such an honour named. What's more to do,
Which would be planted newly with the time,
As calling home our exiled friends abroad
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny;
Producing forth the cruel ministers
Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen,
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life; this, and what needful else
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,
We will perform in measure, time and place:
So, thanks to all at once and to each one,
Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone.

Flourish. Exeunt

Macduff addresses Malcolm, Duncan's son and rightful king. The image is a powerful one – made more powerful by the presence of Macbeth's severed head, probably being displayed at this point on some sort of pole or spike. Renaissance tragedies largely end the same way – our protagonist is dead and despite their flaws we are sorry to see them go. Macduff here refers to him as the "usurper" – reminding us to check our sorrow and remember he had no rightful claim to the throne.

Malcolm's remark relates to the relationship between the seeming disruption in linear time and the disruption of lineal succession: without its rightful ruler, a country has no future. Normal time is only restored when Macbeth dies and order is restored to Scotland.

This language cements the idea that Malcolm is chosen by God (linked to the Jacobean belief in The Divine Right of Kings). This language is directly contrasted to that used to describe Macbeth which often used the semantic field of Hell.