

SCENE VII. Macbeth's castle.

Hautboys and torches. Enter a Sewer, and divers Servants with dishes and service, and pass over the stage. Then enter MACBETH

MACBETH

Macbeth does not explicitly say that he is musing over the planned murder of Duncan. This avoidance suggests hesitation on Macbeth's part, perhaps a belief that if 'it' is mentioned, then he has sealed his own, and Duncan's, fate.

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
 It were done quickly: if the 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,

Macbeth's primary concern is being discovered and the punishment of committing the sin of regicide. Here, we see Macbeth's selfish and egotistical nature, he is concerned only for his own well-being rather than the immorality of his actions.

This is an example of foreshadowing, Macbeth notes that no bad deed goes unpunished and that such an act would undoubtedly bring retribution. This is proven to be true, as both he and his wife ultimately receive their punishment. This moral would have been significant to the Jacobean audience and King James 1st. King James I was overly paranoid of espionage, conspiracies and rebellions because he felt insecure about his sovereignty. The play 'Macbeth' would have acted as a warning to any who attempted to conspire against him that their actions would result in dire consequences.

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 the inventor: this even-handed justice
 Commends the ingredients of our poison'd chalice

A chalice is a vessel for drinking wine— this oxymoron renders the audience aghast as they realise the magnitude of desecrating such a sacred object. This image effectively demonstrates the potential cataclysmic effect that ambition can bring, foreshadowing the future murders that he commits.

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-tongued, against

This simile is used to highlight Duncan's virtues. Macbeth describes Duncan's positive attributes and emphasises his Christian nature, beliefs and principals. Duncan is the living embodiment of the political and social order that Macbeth destroys.

Apocalyptic imagery that continues on from line 19 indicates King Duncan's virtuousness and innocence and that retribution is sure to fall on Macbeth and his crimes against King Duncan be made known to all. This reflects firstly the fear which Macbeth has of murdering King Duncan based on moral conscience, showing that Macbeth has not yet transitioned into evil. It secondly elevates Duncan to the highest pedestal of innocence. The juxtaposition of Duncan with Macbeth therefore accentuates the idea that Macbeth is not the honourable and worthy thane he once was.

The deep damnation of his taking-off;
 And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
 Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim, horsed
 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

Another simile is used to highlight Duncan's innocence and spark compassion and sympathy from the audience. Duncan's almost faultless nature only acts to highlight the horror of Macbeth's plan.

The metaphor suggests how amplified and exaggerated the consequences will be. The verb "drown" suggests that sorrow will completely submerge and fully silence and stop the movement of the wind.

To prick the sides of my intent, but only
 Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
 And falls on the other.

This shows how Macbeth recognises he is dangerously ambitious and alludes to a man jumping onto a horse and missing all together.

Enter LADY MACBETH

How now! what news?

LADY MACBETH

He has almost supp'd: why have you left the chamber?

MACBETH

Hath he ask'd for me?

LADY MACBETH

Know you not he has?

MACBETH

We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

Macbeth's tone is resolute and domineering. The verb "will" is powerful as it shows that Macbeth's decision is unchangeable, or at least he believes it to be. He is clearly attempting to take control of the relationship

Macbeth's need to justify his reasoning to his wife suggests that he is already aware that she will react negatively. He also does not mention one of the main reasons for his decision (that he fears repercussions), but instead attempts to appeal to her morals and sense of reason.

LADY MACBETH

Was the hope drunk

Wherein you dress'd yourself? hath it slept since?

And wakes it now, to look so green and pale

At what it did so freely? From this time

Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard

To be the same in thine own act and valour

As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that

Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,

And live a coward in thine own esteem,

Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'

Like the poor cat i' the adage?

MACBETH

Prithee, peace:

I dare do all that may become a man;

Who dares do more is none.

LADY MACBETH

What beast was't, then,

That made you break this enterprise to me?

When you durst do it, then you were a man;

And, to be more than what you were, you would

Lady Macbeth belittles her husband, asking him if he was "drunk" when he made the decision to murder Duncan, but now has come to regret it. The visual image of him as "green and pale" is designed to make Macbeth feel humiliation, as though he looks physically weakened at the thought of taking the crown. By questioning Macbeth's daring, she calls into question his power and bravery – crucial characteristics for Jacobean men.

She continues using emotional blackmail, suggesting that he does not care for her if he does not go through with the act. This clever use of manipulation illustrates Lady Macbeth's cunning and shrewdness: she clearly knows how to exploit her husband's insecurities for her own gain.

Shakespeare explores masculinity as an attribute that is easily influenced by others. We have recently been told of Macbeth's bravery and violence in battle, and yet Lady Macbeth's use of the adjective "coward" is clearly intended to spark his need to prove his manhood.

Again, she twists his words and takes the literal definition of "man", reversing it, asking him what kind of animal agreed to her proposition before (when in reality he never agreed in the first place).

She continues to use rhetorical questions to gain her desired reaction from Macbeth. Perhaps understanding that fear is one of the main reasons for his hesitation, she mentions this directly, as if to encourage him to challenge her to deny his feelings in order to preserve his masculine image.

She is trying to appeal to Macbeth's ambition by reminding him that if he does what she says he will become king. She knows that ambition is his hamartia (greatest weakness) and is using this to tempt him.

This refers to a fable where a cat loves fish but doesn't want to get its paws wet.

Macbeth attempts to make his wife understand that he dares to do everything that is proper for a man to do, and anyone who does more is not a man at all. His reply is short, mirroring his lack of power and control in both this conversation and in the relationship.

She aligns masculinity with cruelty and daring violence, claiming that he was more of a man then than now.

The image of the child, classically used to represent innocence, motherhood and naivety, is perverted throughout the play, with the Witches using 'finger of a birth-strangled babe' in their cauldron, and Macbeth's hallucination of a bloody child. This emotive, graphic description is used deliberately by Lady Macbeth to shock her husband into submission, along with revealing the true villainous nature of Lady Macbeth to the Jacobean audience.

Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. 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 my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

Shakespeare exaggerates the line with the use of the clinical, anatomical "nipple" and "brains" as a way to strip the scene of tenderness. Lady Macbeth is truly subverting stereotypical feminine roles, rejecting the passive, nurturing role of the mother and instead corrupts this image by turning it into one of extreme violence and horror.

Again, the character of Macbeth is only granted a few words as evidence of his lack of power. The notion of power is presented as an extremely pivotal force which can either unify or divide the two – in this case we see them united through the use of the collective pronoun "we".

MACBETH
If we should fail?

LADY MACBETH

We fail!

But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep--
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey

i.e., fix your courage to something sturdy, toughen up and get ready for action. She is implying the only thing that could cause them to fail is his own lack of bravery.

The sound sleep during which Duncan will be murdered contrasts with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's sleeplessness after the murder. The rightful King sleeps well; the unlawful King tosses and turns, therefore highlighting Duncan's right to rule (The Divine Right of Kings). It was believed by many that sleeplessness was a sign of guilt, so Duncan's ability to sleep further solidifies our opinions of him as righteous, innocent man.

Soundly invite him--his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason

A limbeck only: when in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon

A rhetorical question used to encourage Macbeth into feeling confident – "unguarded" is used specifically by Lady Macbeth to highlight the lack of risk in her plan.

Macbeth's comment emphasizes the ridged Jacobean gender roles – Lady Macbeth possesses typically male characteristics, and so Macbeth believes that she will be capable of birthing only male children. This image is jarring, as it is in direct contrast with Lady Macbeth's violent description of killing a child.

The unguarded Duncan? what not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?

This line is deeply ironic as although the guards shall be blamed for the death, it shall be both Lady Macbeth and Macbeth who in fact suffer from the "guilt" of his murder.

MACBETH

Bring forth men-children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males. Will it not be received,
When we have mark'd with blood those sleepy two
Of his own chamber and used their very daggers,
That they have done't?

Foreshadowing – blood is used as a symbol of guilt throughout the play.

LADY MACBETH

Who dares receive it other,
As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar

Upon his death?

MACBETH

Much as with his initial decision, Macbeth is once again resolute in his opinions, having been swayed by the clever manipulation of Lady Macbeth.

I am settled, and bend up

Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.

Away, and mock the time with fairest show:

False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

Exeunt

Link to the themes of duality and appearances v reality. Macbeth also uses both iambic pentameter and a rhyming couplet in his final lines, mirroring the speech patterns of the Witches. This would suggest to the audience that Macbeth has now aligned himself with the powers of evil, having been manipulated by both the Witches and Lady Macbeth.