

Act V SCENE I. Dunsinane. Ante-room in the castle.

We, as an audience, are affected by the entrance of the Doctor. A Doctor is someone in a position of power and trust, someone who is there for the best of everyone.

Enter a Doctor of Physic and a Waiting-Gentlewoman

An antechamber (also known as an anteroom or ante-room) is a smaller room or vestibule serving as an entryway into a larger one.

Doctor
I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

The gentlewoman's description of how Lady Macbeth has sleepwalked in the past acts as a stage direction for the actress playing Lady Macbeth. Her agitated reading of a letter is of course a visual reminder of her reading of the fateful letter in Act I, Scene 5.

The doctor comments that Lady Macbeth's behaviour is unnatural. This is significant as throughout the play a Jacobean audience would have believed Lady Macbeth's attitude and beliefs to be extremely unnatural as it would go against their traditional expectations of gender roles in society.

Gentlewoman
Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

Doctor
A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching! In this slumbery agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?

The gentlewoman refuses to repeat what she has heard Lady Macbeth say. This could link to the theme of loyalty, meaning that she would be unwilling to betray the Queen. However, it is more likely that what Lady Macbeth say said has been so shocking that the Gentlewoman is concerned that she will not be believed.

Gentlewoman
That, sir, which I will not report after her.

The Gentlewoman's fear about revealing what she knows speaks of the atmosphere of anxiety and dread that Macbeth has created in Scotland.

Doctor
You may to me: and 'tis most meet you should.

Gentlewoman
Neither to you nor any one; having no witness to confirm my speech.

Candlelight is used in the play as a way to distinguish between night and day. The globe has an open roof and therefore Shakespeare must rely on props to indicate this shift in time.

Enter LADY MACBETH, with a taper

Sleep is repeatedly compared with death throughout the play, indeed, sleep is "death's counterfeit". Furthermore, while Macbeth cannot sleep, we see that Lady Macbeth in arguably a worse state: even though she is asleep, sleepwalking and hallucinations mean that sleep can no longer perform its function of soothing the mind.

Lo you, here she comes! This is her very guise; and, upon my life, fast asleep. Observe her; stand close.

Doctor
How came she by that light?

Gentlewoman
Why, it stood by her: she has light by her continually; 'tis her command.

This is ironic, as in Act 1 scene 5 she called for darkness, "come thick night..." and now she cannot be without a light. Light is used symbolically through the play to represent goodness and purity. It can be assumed from Lady Macbeth's actions that she seeks the comfort of this and relief from the guilt of her wrongdoings.

Doctor
You see, her eyes are open.

The Gentlewoman confirms that Lady Macbeth is unaware of what she is doing or those around her. She seems to be consumed wholly by her guilt.

Gentlewoman
Ay, but their sense is shut.

Doctor
What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

The directive "look" draws the attention of the audience to Lady Macbeth.

It seems that Lady Macbeth's action of rubbing her hands is habitual, suggesting that her guilt has been causing this strange behaviour for an extended period of time.

Gentlewoman
It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

Lady Macbeth's speech has become fragmented and broken by an enormous emotional pressure, as shown through her use of a series of short exclamatory sentences. There are no logical connections between her memories or her sentences, and indeed, the devastation of her mind is so complete that she cannot recall events in their correct order.

Lady Macbeth seems unable to wash away the blood that she believes is on her hands. This is deeply ironic, as she previously told Macbeth that "A little water clears us of this deed" Now, however, she too hallucinates blood.

LADY MACBETH
Yet here's a spot.

Doctor
Hark! she speaks: I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

The rhetorical question "where is she now?" suggests that she is feeling extremely vulnerable and has come to the realisation that wealth and power are no guarantee of safety.

LADY MACBETH
Out, damned spot! out, I say!--One: two: why, then, 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky!--Fie, my lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account?--Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.

We can assume by "old man" she is referring to King Duncan. As blood is used symbolically throughout the play to represent feelings of guilt, Lady Macbeth's statement suggests that she did not realise that the murder of the king would produce such feelings of guilt. Lady Macbeth's guilt makes it impossible for her to hide the horrors that she and Macbeth have committed. Her conscience is rebelling against the unnatural fiend that ambition has turned her into.

Lady Macbeth fears that her hands will never be "clean" – that she will never be able to wash away the blood (symbolic of guilt) that she sees on her hands. This is a stark contrast between A2S2 in which she chastises Macbeth for his feelings of guilt and tells him that "a little water clears us of this deed".

Doctor
Do you mark that?

LADY MACBETH
The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?--What, will these hands ne'er be clean?--No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that: you mar all with this starting.

Doctor
Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.

Her use of hyperbole expresses her belief that nothing in the world could ever take away the guilt she is feeling. Her words are strikingly similar to those of Macbeth in A2S2, in which he exclaims, "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?". It is clear that their feelings have exchanged and that is now Lady Macbeth suffering the ramifications of a guilty conscience.

Gentlewoman
She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that: heaven knows what she has known.

Her unconscious words and actions give her away to the Gentlewoman.

LADY MACBETH
Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, oh, oh!

Doctor
What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

The Gentlewoman seems to be the voice of morality in this scene, suggesting that even if it meant being queen, she would not want to carry the heavy burden of guilt that Lady Macbeth carries. This would echo the thoughts and feelings of the Jacobean audience, as they would view Lady Macbeth's madness and a direct result of her immoral and unnatural behaviour.

Gentlewoman
I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity of the whole body.

Doctor
Well, well, well,--

Gentlewoman
Pray God it be, sir.

The Doctor says that he cannot treat Lady Macbeth, presumably as her illness is of the mind and not the body. In Jacobean England, those with mental health problems were often believed to be possessed by demons or devils that had to be cast out – linked directly to Lady Macbeth’s calling upon the “spirits” in A1S5. It is clear that the character of Lady Macbeth serves as an illustration of the constant battle for people to resist the temptations of evil and to do good and the consequences of meddling with the supernatural / natural order.

Lady Macbeth’s words take on a whole new meaning in this scene as throughout the play she has been continually reminding Macbeth that he should not dwell upon events that cannot be changed. Ironically, now it is she who is unable to escape the memories of her past and it is clear that the effects of her sins “cannot be undone”.

The Doctor is shocked by what Lady Macbeth has revealed but is afraid to speak what he knows. This reflects the atmosphere of fear and mistrust that Macbeth’s tyrannical rule has created in Scotland.

Doctor
 This disease is beyond my practise: yet I have known those which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds.

LADY MACBETH
 Wash your hands, put on your nightgown; look not so pale.--I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on's grave.

Doctor
 Even so?

LADY MACBETH
 To bed, to bed! there's knocking at the gate: come, come, come, come, give me your hand. What's done cannot be undone.--To bed, to bed, to bed!

Exit

Doctor
 Will she go now to bed?

Gentlewoman
 Directly.

Doctor
 Foul whisperings are abroad: unnatural deeds
 Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds
 To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets:
 More needs she the divine than the physician.
 God, God forgive us all! Look after her;
 Remove from her the means of all annoyance,
 And still keep eyes upon her. So, good night:
 My mind she has mated, and amazed my sight.
 I think, but dare not speak.

Gentlewoman
 Good night, good doctor.

Exeunt

Lady Macbeth’s thoughts have become muddled and she re-living parts of conversations help with Macbeth. The words themselves seem nonsensical as she is jumping from thought to thought, however it would be clear to the audience that Lady Macbeth is reliving all the crimes, remembering sounds, smells, and images.

Lady Macbeth is remembering her words to Macbeth in A2S2 – “I hear a knocking at the south entry: retire we to our chamber”. Undoubtedly this event which she previously treated with such flippancy has had a significant effect upon her and is the root of her madness.

The Doctor’s words reflect the unnatural events that have occurred since the Murder of King Duncan.

The Doctor believes that Lady Macbeth requires the help of a priest as it is her immortal soul that is damaged rather than her body. The Jacobean audience would have believed that as Lady Macbeth has sinned against God and disrupted His natural order that only God could offer her relief or forgiveness.