

English 9  
*Macbeth* review

Macbeth is a tragedy. Look for:

a tragic hero  
of noble birth, middling character  
with tragic flaw (hamartia: “an aiming for the mark and missing”)

peripeteia

anagnorisis

In Greek tragedy, as we have discussed, these aspects are pretty distinct. In Shakespearean tragedy, they can be more muted, distorted, or absent. How do we see them happening in *Macbeth*?

Here are some important passages. Take notes on who says them, what they mean, what interesting elements they indicate you should look for:

1. Fair is foul, and foul is fair;  
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

2. And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,  
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's  
In deepest consequence.

3. Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts! unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe, top-full  
Of direst cruelty; make thick my blood,  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall.

4. Look like the innocent flower,  
But be the serpent under it.

5. I have no spur

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

6. Is this a dagger which I see before me,  
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee;  
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.  
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible  
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but  
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,  
Proceeding from the heat-oppresed brain?  
I see thee yet, in form as palpable  
As this which now I draw.

7. Methought I heard a voice cry, Sleep no more!  
Macbeth does murder sleep, — the innocent sleep;  
Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,  
The death of each day's life, sore labor's bath,  
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,  
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

8. Nought's had, all's spent  
Where our desire is got without content.

9. I am in blood  
Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more,  
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.

10. Out, damned spot! out, I say!

11. Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
To the last syllable of recorded time;  
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!  
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.