

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

killing of Duncan

anagnorisis

"She should have died hereafter ..."

Use Folger full text to  
locate any ~~text~~ passages  
you can't confidently place.

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*?

The hamartia (hubris/ambition/security) and peripeteia are clear + distinct, effective at putting the tragedy in motion. The underdeveloped anagnorisis — showing Macbeth as cold, preoccupied,

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

nihilistic, reduces our catharsis + feeling for him.

1. Fair is foul, and foul is fair;

Hover through the fog and filthy air.

The passage, from the witches at the very beginning, shows sonic integrity (f's alliteration, rhyme) but inverted meaning (fair...foul). The passage sets up the dark, distorted world of the play.

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.

This is Banquo, after the visit with the witches. He is a foil for Macbeth. While he is having his hair "unfixed" + his "seated head lurch at [his] ribs," Banquo is reasoning it through. Maybe the witches are bad? Also, passage points to theme of appearance + reality.

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.

Blood is contrasted  
with milk — violence  
vs kindness; guilt vs  
innocence.

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

Lady Macbeth gives this advice  
to Macbeth. Theme: appearance  
+ reality. The imagery is Ederic.

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.

Macbeth thinks through the  
murder for himself, going  
through all of Duncan's good  
qualities — he decides his only  
real motive is his own ambition / hubris. He  
then decides, rather weakly, that he won't  
murder Duncan. Lady Macbeth persuades him  
to do it, taunting him as unmanly.

Metaphor: horse

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-oppressed brain?  
I see thee yet, in form as palpable  
As this which now I draw.

Here, just before he  
murder. Macbeth  
hallucinates a dagger,  
as he's so "heart-oppressed"  
by his desire + the horror  
of what he's about to do.

The dagger is an emblem of the murder, of  
course, but it is supernatural, strange, + beyond  
what Macbeth can control.

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.

Just after the murder,  
Macbeth reports to Lady  
Macbeth, he hears this  
voice. We understand sleep

as having to do with escape/health/healing balm  
in this passage. We remember that the witches  
made the Master o' the Tiger sleepless — we associate  
lack of proper sleep with insanity. Macbeth will no  
longer have access to sleep.

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

(Sleep elsewhere indicates  
vulnerability)

Lady Macbeth says this  
right ~~before~~ Macbeth makes a  
similar comment ("we have scorched the snake..."). The  
murder of Duncan has led to more consequences  
and a perceived need to continue to kill.

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

The peripeteia is happening —  
the reversal is underway.

4. 62 This is Macbeth's  
turning point; there won't be a good death,  
like Cawdor's, for him. The moment is right  
after the appearance of Banquo's ghost at the  
banquet. Blood = guilt, also

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

In Act 5 Lady Macbeth, absent for a  
good portion of the play, reappears, much  
declined. She sleepwalks + mimes washing her  
hands, an echo of Macbeth from just after the  
murder. Their reversal  
is complete.

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.

This nihilistic speech is  
Macbeth's distorted  
agnositis. The beauty of  
the language shows us the deep  
sadness behind the numbness

Macbeth ~~stands~~. He is reacting to Lady Macbeth's  
death in 5.2. Life is meaningless for him —  
his corruption is complete.

