

## Brave

He has bravely fought in a battle on the side of his ruler, King Duncan, against the King of Norway and other treacherous Scots who have switched sides: 'For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name)'(1,2). The Captain, who is telling King Duncan about the battle, is clearly impressed by Macbeth's bravery. By using **brackets** here (or dashes in some versions), Shakespeare is emphasising that Macbeth deserves to be called brave and that his bravery stands out. Macbeth shows that he is an honourable man by fighting like this for his king and risking his own life. He obviously lives by the heroic code (tells you how a noble person should act).

## Pitied

As a **tragic hero**, Macbeth still needs to be pitied, so that at the end of the play, the audience are not angry at Macbeth, but fear the dangers of being overambitious. Shakespeare evokes sympathy and pity for Macbeth through these ways:

- Murder of Duncan occurs offstage.
- Murders of Banquo and Lady Macduff take place at his orders.
- Hecate tells the witches essentially that Macbeth is not a true son of evil.
- Macbeth is portrayed as heroic and brave as he refuses to surrender 'I will not yield' 'Before my body I throw my warlike shield' (5,8)

## Relationship with Lady Macbeth

Macbeth writes to his wife and tells her about what the witches have said. It is interesting that he seems to treat her more equally – this could suggest that he either cares about her, or he values her opinion. Many men would not talk such things with their wives. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are together on stage for the first time. Lady Macbeth dominates the conversation. Macbeth hardly speaks. Macbeth uses loving language towards his wife, 'My dearest love' (1,5). Lady Macbeth greets him by flattering his status, 'Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor' (1,5). When Lady Macbeth dies, Macbeth says 'She should have died hereafter'(5,5). It is as if he has lost the ability to feel following the murderous path he has been travelling down.



## Banquo's foil

Banquo and Macbeth are perfect parallels at the beginning of the play, yet both react in such a different way to the witches' prophecies. Banquo is not very interested and quite suspicious, saying that he does 'neither beg nor fear your favours nor your hate' (1,2) and he also asks Macbeth 'why do you start' (1,2). Perhaps Macbeth is so startled because the witches have given voice to his inner ambitions.

## Unstable

Throughout the play, Macbeth sees supernatural things, such as a floating dagger, Banquo's ghost and the spirits that are shown to him by the witches. It's unclear whether these visions are real or his hallucinations (ghostly images): 'art thou but / A dagger of the mind, a false creation, / Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?' (2,1). After Macbeth has killed King Duncan, he believes he has 'murdered sleep' (2,2). He seems ashamed of the blood on his hands, calling it a 'sorry sight'. This suggests that he already feels regret over the murder. It is the last time, until the final act, that we see Macbeth kill anyone with his own hands. Murder seems to have disturbed him.

## Trusts the supernatural

It is also Macbeth who begins to trust witchcraft and the supernatural, letting it take over his life – King James I, and most citizens of England and Scotland, hated anything supernatural. Macbeth's trust in the witches means that Jacobean audiences (English and Scottish history that coincides with the reign of James VI) would distrust and dislike him intensely. Towards the beginning of the play, Macbeth decides that if fate has said he will be king, then that will happen without him interfering: 'If chance will have me king, why then chance may crown me, / Without my stir' (1,3).

## Feminine

When Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost, Lady Macbeth asks him, 'Are you a man?' (3,4). This **rhetorical question** suggests that a lack of courage makes him less of a man. People often saw mental disturbances as a female problem.

## Violent nature

'He unseam'd him from the nave to the chaps, / And fix'd his head upon our battlements' (1,2) When fighting the Norwegian enemies, Macbeth attacked a man he had never met before and slit him open from his belly to his jaw, and then cut off his head and placed it on the battlements. This action is horrific but is viewed as heroic because it happened to an enemy. It is also Macbeth who begins murdering anyone who he thinks might get in the way of him keeping his powerful role as King of Scotland.

## Ambitious: Macbeth's Hamartia

The temptation of ambition robs Macbeth of the essence of his existence as a human being and leaves behind nothing but discontent and a worthless life. We pity him.

## Tragic hero

Aristotle's theories of tragedy are clearly shown through Macbeth, the tragic hero. Macbeth is clearly a **tragic hero**: at the outset of the play, he is a noble warrior whose loyalty is commended and rewarded by King Duncan. Macbeth's **hamartia** (flaw) is his ambition and, together with his hubris – 'I must not yield to one of woman born' (5,8) – it is his undoing. The **peripeteia** (change in fortune from good to bad) is the regicide as, from this moment forth, Macbeth knows he is damned: 'What's done is done,'(3,2) as his wife later reminds him.

## Tyrant

'black' and 'devilish' (4,3) are **adjectives** used by the thanes to describe Macbeth. The audience learns that Macbeth is a tyrannical (oppressive and controlling) king and Scotland is suffering under his rule. 'something wicked this way comes' (4,1) is how the witches refer to Macbeth during his visit in Act 4, Scene 1. This highlights his shift to being an evil character. Contextually, Macbeth's allegiance with the witches and his desire to see their prophecies come true, suggest he is as an evil character – he seems to accept supernatural forces, whereas a Jacobean audience would consider this incredibly evil. He uses witchcraft to reinforce his tyrannical reign – Scotland suffers because he listened to the witches and became the ruler, killing anyone who disagreed with him or potentially threatened his claim to the throne.

## Masculine and Powerful

- She doubts that her husband can do it: '*Thou wouldst be great, / Art not without ambition, but without / The illness should attend it*' (1,5). She says that he could be more powerful and that he is ambitious, but he does not have the evil inside him to help him do what is needed. Here, Lady Macbeth implies that she sees kindness and goodness as bad traits. When Macbeth arrives home, Lady Macbeth dominates (has power over) the conversation. Macbeth hardly speaks.
- She decides the plan: '*O never / Shall sun that morrow see*' (1,5). This suggests that King Duncan will not live to see the dawn of the next day under their roof.
- When she asks to be '*unsex[ed]*', she is asking the spirits to remove the feminine aspects of her character. Women were supposed to be gentle and kind. She wants to be cruel and not feel regret over any of her actions: '*fill me from the crown to the toe topfull / Of direst cruelty*' (1,5). She wants to be able to force her husband to murder the king.
- Shakespeare fills her speech in Act 1, Scene 5 with imperative (ordering) verbs to show that she is taking control: '*Come*', '*fill*', '*stop*', '*take*'. She wants to be harder so that she can commit these crimes. These characteristics were definitely seen as masculine, but not honourable.
- She says, '*Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall*'. This is possibly the clearest demand to have her femininity removed. She no longer wants to be able to nurture children with her breastmilk. She wants her breastmilk to be filled with bitter poison instead – this is a clear indication that she does not want to nurture anyone; she wants to cause pain and death.
- A Jacobean audience would have found her rejection of everything a woman should value very shocking. The fact that she wants to make her husband murder the king is even more shocking.
- Macbeth tells her '*Bring forth men-children only*' (1,7). This suggests she has masculine qualities. She is so masculine that her husband thinks she should only give birth to male children (traditionally seen as the stronger sex).

## Ruthless

- When the audience first sees Lady Macbeth on stage, she is reading the letter from her husband. Even though Macbeth has not spoken about trying to take the crown in his letter, Lady Macbeth immediately wants to do this.
- In her speech, she summarises her plan to manipulate Macbeth into going after the crown: '*Hie thee hither, / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear*'.
- Lady Macbeth thinks that Macbeth is not cunning or devious enough. She thinks that he struggles to trick people. She tells her husband to think about the facial expression that he is pulling. He should think about it to hide his true intentions. She uses the following simile: '*look like th' innocent flower, / But be the serpent under 't*' (1,5). This links back to the witch's line: '*Fair is foul and foul is fair*' – Lady Macbeth wants her husband to practice this, to be able to encourage people to trust him, and then to betray them without warning.

## Manipulative

- Lady Macbeth takes the role of co-conspirator in the play. Lady Macbeth is the person who comes up with the plot to kill good King Duncan. She becomes very insistent that Macbeth should murder King Duncan, pushing him to do it and implying that he is weak and useless if he refuses.
- When Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth that they will no longer kill King Duncan, she tries to change his mind by manipulating him. At first, she attacks his courage. She asks him if he plans to live his life in fear: '*live a coward in thine own esteem*' (1,7). She then tells him that he has broken a promise to her. She says she would rather murder her own child than go back on her word to him.
- Lady Macbeth drugs the guards outside King Duncan's chamber and puts their daggers ready for the murder. In this way, she manipulates the murder scene itself to make sure that Macbeth will not be blamed. She even thought about killing the king herself: '*Had he not resembled / My father as he slept, I had done it*' (2,2). This is interesting because it shows that she has some softer emotion – a love for her father.



## Secretive

- Lady Macbeth seems to be very good at hiding her true thoughts. She proves this when she greets King Duncan in Act 1, Scene 6. He refers to her as '*honoured hostess*' many times. This repeatedly emphasises that she is supposed to protect him in her home. Shakespeare is using dramatic irony here: the audience know that she plans to kill him, but she meets him with kind words and welcome. King Duncan seems to completely trust his friends. Her manipulative and secretive nature highlights her as a villain in the story. She wants her husband to murder the king purely so they can become more powerful.

## Suicide and sin:

- At the end, Malcolm tells those surrounding them that Lady Macbeth, '*by self and violent hands / Took off her own life*' (5,9). This suggests that she killed herself. Suicide was seen as a sin. But by this stage, Lady Macbeth has already damned (condemned) her immortal soul by being involved in the plot to kill King Duncan. It's unlikely that she fears this happening. When she was sleepwalking, she said '*Hell is murky*' (5,1). This may suggest that she is already existing in a sort of hell.
- The human side of Lady Macbeth comes through with her apparent suicide. For Lady Macbeth, life is no longer an option because she cannot escape the horrible guilt about her role in the murders. Audiences may feel some sympathy for Lady Macbeth, as Jacobean audiences would know that suicide was a very last resort – the suicide shows that she does have some humanity.

## Mentally Disturbed

- Sleepwalking was seen as a sign that someone was possessed by a demon. So, a Jacobean (during the reign of James I of England) audience might have thought that this was because Lady Macbeth invited the spirits into her at the start of the play. Sleepwalking here is also the sign of a distressed mind. The doctor later tells Macbeth, '*Not so sick, my lord, / As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies / That keep her from her rest*' (5,3).
- '*Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand*' (5,1). Shakespeare could be suggesting that we cannot escape from the consequences of our actions. Sometimes, we have to admit to our faults and deal with them – otherwise, like Lady Macbeth, they will haunt us. Even though Lady Macbeth comes across as a somewhat evil, cruel character, she does have a human side that struggles to deal with the reality of what she has done.
- The structure here (5,1) moves into prose (ordinary language without a metre), rather than the usual **iambic pentameter** that Shakespeare writes in. Shakespeare might be doing this to show how her speech is fluid (free) and doesn't have structure. This would suggest that it is more natural and honest.
- The blood isn't real - it is a symbol of the guilt that she feels over the murder.

## Abnormal

- These lines are written in **trochaic tetrameter** (four sets of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable – ‘double, double toil and trouble’). Shakespeare usually writes in **iambic pentameter**, so this highlights the witches as unusual. This structure shows that the witches speak in a different way to everyone else and that they are doing something incredibly important, as they stress these harsh sounds and repeat the lines themselves. This moment is almost a threat to Macbeth – they are chanting and aiming their spell at him, and it is a powerful spell.
- These lines show that the witches’ speeches (and their intentions) are full of **double meanings (equivocations)** – they are not what they appear, and they cannot be trusted.

## Not as powerful as they appear to Macbeth

One of the witches takes revenge on a sailor, but we are told that the witch does not have the power to take the sailor’s life: ‘**Though his bark cannot be lost, yet it shall be tempest-tossed**’.

Shakespeare’s use of **structure** is key here, he deliberately shows the audience the limits of the witches’ power. This means that when Macbeth arrives and is captivated by them, we can see that his infatuation tells us more about him than it does about the witches.

Also, the scene with Hecate undermines the witches as she is referred to as ‘**the mistress of your charms**’.

## Powerful and supernatural

- The audience see them planning to meet Macbeth. This suggests that nothing that happens is accidental. The witches are also called the ‘**weird sisters**’. This has roots in classical mythology: the three ‘**wyrd**’ sisters were the fates, who knew men’s destinies.
- In Greek and Roman mythology, witches who talked about fates were in a group of three. In Norse mythology, there were also a group of three women who made predictions about the future. The Rule of Three is a pagan belief – it states that whatever energy witches put into the world will be returned to them three times. In Macbeth, the witches seem to be in a group of three, and speak in threes, to strengthen their power.
- Macbeth orders them to stay, but they disappear: ‘**Stay, you imperfect speakers. Tell me more.**’ (1,3) This shows that he cannot control the witches’ actions (or his own fate).
- The witches talk about ‘**Graymalkin**’ and ‘**Paddock**’ (1,1). These are a cat and a toad. People believed that witches had animal helpers to help them do their wicked deeds. Shakespeare relates to these characters to show the audience that they are wicked creatures.



## Evil

- At the start of Act 1, Scene 3, the witches are talking about what they have been doing. The Second Witch says things like ‘**killing swine**’ - this suggests that the witch has been harming animals. The first witch says a story about how she plans to torture a sailor whose wife refused to share her chestnuts: ‘**Bit in a sieve I’ll thither sail, / And like a rat without a tail, / I’ll do, I’ll do and I’ll do**’ (1,3). Immediately, the witches are shown to be ruthless and evil – they harm things just because they can, or because they cannot get their own way.
- Banquo struggles to identify whether they are women or not: ‘**you should be women / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so**’ (1,3). Their unconventional (not normal), even ugly appearance is perhaps to remind the audience of how unattractive witchcraft was. Women who practised it started to look inhumane. This shows Shakespeare conforming to the ideas of Jacobean England, where the supernatural was feared and seen as unnatural. Those who practised it were viewed as evil – the witches’ ugly appearance may echo this apparent inner-evil.
- The witches chant the line ‘**Fair is foul and foul is fair**’ (1,1). This shows that the natural order of things is already being disrupted and this will continue throughout the play. The natural order is disrupted because of the witches.
- When Macbeth and Banquo first see the witches, Banquo doesn’t know what they are: ‘**What are these, / So withered and so wild in their attire, / That look not like th’ inhabitants o’ th’ earth, / And yet are on’ t’**’ (1,3). The witches don’t look human. Their clothing is ‘**withered**’ and ‘**wild**’. This suggests that they don’t live like normal members of society.
- The idea that one of the witches can sail in a sieve (‘**in a sieve I’ll thither sail**’ (1,3)) is related to the accusations made against the Berwick witches. These were a group of people accused of trying to harm King James I when he returned with his new wife across the North Sea. Shakespeare makes it very clear that these women embody (express) all the evil-doing associated with witches at the time.

## Witchcraft

The witches introduce the theme of the supernatural, which in Jacobean times would have been a big draw for audiences because there was a huge amount of interest and belief about witchcraft. Practicing witchcraft was a crime punishable by death in Shakespeare’s time and during the Jacobean era, King James is estimated to be responsible for the burning of 4000 alleged witches in Scotland alone.

Through beginning the play with the witches, Shakespeare not only grabs the attention of the audience, but also of the King, an important source of revenue.

## Macbeth's foil

Banquo almost acts as Macbeth's conscience – Macbeth arguably feels the most guilt for betraying his friend and murdering him, just to make sure that he has power. The fact that Banquo is portrayed to be Macbeth's foil, highlights Macbeth's flaws and downfall.

Similarities
Both are captains in the army. 'Our captains Macbeth and Banquo'
Both are brave warriors as explained by the Sargent. 'they were as cannons overcharged with double cracks'
Both are well-respected. They are both referred to as 'Noble'
Differences
The characters start to differ in their actions following their interaction with the witches in Act 1 scene 3.
Banquo is sceptical and weary, telling the witches that he does 'neither beg nor fear your favours or your hate'
Macbeth's reaction is different. When the witches prophesise that he will one day become king, Banquo asks Macbeth 'Why do you start' meaning why are you so startled.
Only Macbeth takes matters into his own hands and embarks on his bloody campaign of violence. Banquo is not ambitious in the way that Macbeth is.
Banquo tells his son, Fleance, to 'take my sword' since he does not want to go to sleep because of the 'cursed thoughts' he's been having. A few moments later, Banquo informs Macbeth that he 'dreamt last night of the three weird sisters'. This could mean that Banquo gave his sword to Fleance because he did not trust himself not to do something evil with it.



## Macbeth and Banquo's friendship

Banquo tells Macbeth that he has dreamed about the witches. Macbeth says he has given them no thought. This shows he is now lying to his friend. Macbeth tells him they will speak about it at a later time. (2,1)

## Good Man (distrusts the supernatural)

- He fears that they may have made the prophecies (predictions) to hurt Macbeth: 'Oftentimes, to win us to our harm, / The instruments of darkness tell us truths' (1,3). As someone who distrusts and fears the witches throughout the whole play, Banquo is shown to be a good, God-fearing character in the play. Jacobean audiences feared the supernatural, and Banquo echoes this fear. He does not allow them to manipulate him and does not show a lot of interest in the prophecies.
- Although Banquo hopes that the witches' prophecies (predictions) will come true for him - 'May they not be my oracles as well / And set me up in hope?' (3,1) - he does not show any desire to force them. He does not really engage in the supernatural.

## Idealised loyal subject

- In Act 2, Scene 3, Macduff finds King Duncan's body: 'O horror, horror, horror, / Tongue nor heart cannot conceive, nor name thee.' He is struggling to speak about what he has seen. The fact he can't speak properly here highlights the difference between him and Macbeth. Macbeth is always using words to explore his ideas and feelings. Macduff tells the others to go and see for themselves: 'Do not bid me speak.'
- Macduff doesn't go to Macbeth's feast in Act 3, Scene 4: 'How sayst thou that Macduff denies his person / At our great bidding?' This shows that he doesn't support Macbeth's rule over Scotland. When Macduff flees to England (once Macbeth is king), Malcolm initially distrusts Macduff because he was once Macbeth's friend. But Malcolm finds that Macduff hates the tyrant king. Macduff wishes to save Scotland from him and have Scotland return to 'wholesome days' (4,3). Macduff firmly believes that King Duncan's line was chosen by God to rule Scotland, and he wants to restore the natural order and place Duncan's son on the throne.
- Shakespeare's use of **structure** by introducing Macduff right after the death of King Duncan, further makes the audience associate him with characteristics such as loyalty.
- His loyalty is portrayed with Macduff's impassioned outburst in Act 4 scene 3, when Malcom says that as ruler he would 'Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell'. Macduff replies that Malcom is 'Fit to govern? / No, not fit to live'.
- Macduff calls upon 'gentle heavens' in Act 4 scene 3, explaining how he will get revenge, and how this anger and violence is justified.
- This characteristic of Macduff makes him the only fit person to kill him.

It would be unthinkable for Malcom to defeat Macbeth – Malcom who fled the country on the first report of his father's death: he has neither the physical strength nor the spirit to conquer the tyrant; it would be distressing if he did so. Macduff is the only man whose suffering has been portrayed as no less keen than Macbeth's. Moreover, he is represented as noble, courageous, and absolutely incorruptible, the only man Macbeth's equal in bravery.

## Macbeth's foil

Although Banquo also acts as Macbeth's foil, he is killed off in Act 3, and after this, Macduff seems to take the position of being Macbeth's foil.

Macduff sacrifices everything he has (his wife, his children, his castle) to see the rightful heir on the throne and restore the balance and equilibrium in his country. Through Macduff, the audience sees the correct choices and actions that should be taken by a good subject. Loyalty to his nation is his number one priority, and this idea, makes Macbeth look all the more sinful.



## Honourable father

Macbeth kills Macduff's family. Macduff becomes the wronged hero who wants to avenge the deaths of his loved ones. In Act 5, Scene 7, when Macduff is looking for Macbeth, he says: 'Tyrant, show thy face! / If thou be'st slain, and with no stroke of mine, / My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still'. This suggests that Macduff feels haunted by the ghosts of his family. He may feel guilty that he could not protect them because he was away – in the Jacobean era, men were protectors of their wives and children. Macduff is the honourable hero, and so would take this role seriously – this may be partly why he feels so guilty.

### Trusts his subjects

King Duncan admits that he failed to consider that his close friends could ever betray him (like the Thane of Cawdor) – he is a good and trusting king. He says, *'There's no art / To find the mind's construction in the face'* (1,4). When King Duncan arrives at Macbeth's castle, he greets Lady Macbeth in a polite way and thanks her for her trouble. This again shows his generous manner towards his subjects (those under his rule). The very fact that King Duncan happily stays at his subject's home shows how much trust he places in those close to him.

### Father-like

Lady Macbeth thought about killing King Duncan herself, but couldn't, because he looked like her father (2,1). This could suggest that Duncan is kind and cares about his people.

### Reinforces the Divine Right of Kings

King James I believed in the Divine Right of Kings – in Macbeth, King Duncan is shown to be a ruler selected by God, and only answerable to God - his goodness is proof that God gave him this role. This is the opposite of Macbeth, who gains the crown against the law and has no good qualities as a ruler. King Duncan's descendants continue ruling Scotland, whereas Macbeth loses everything (including his wife) and is killed. This shows how God's choice of king is rewarded (even after death), whereas the man who went against God is condemned and suffers.



### Possesses good qualities

When Macbeth thinks about the reasons why he shouldn't murder King Duncan, he lists the king's qualities: *'this Duncan / Hath borne in his faculties so meek, hath been / So clear in his great office, that his virtues / Will plead like angels'* (1,7). Duncan is a great man with excellent moral standards. He compares Duncan's morals to those of an angel, showing how much he admires him.