Macbeth

by

William Shakespeare

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

Mainly set in Scotland in the 11th century, mostly in Macbeth's castle and the king's palace at Forres. Also in military camps and open fields near the battleground, and at King Edward's palace in England.

CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Macbeth - the evil King of Scotland who stole the throne from Duncan by murdering him and who sinks into a state of chaos because of his greed and guilt; his evil acts lead to his ruin, and rebel forces lead an attack against him, and Macduff, in a personal battle, beheads him.

Lady Macbeth - the wife of Macbeth, who is even more driven by greed and power than her husband and who is the manipulative force behind the murder Duncan. Like her husband, fear and remorse cause her ruin; she goes mad and kills herself.

Malcolm - King Duncan's oldest son, rightful heir to the throne of Scotland, who flees to England after his father's murder and later returns to lead a successful attack against Macbeth.

Banquo - a general in Duncan's army and a close friend of Macbeth prior to Macbeth's seizing the throne. Macbeth begins to fear the good Banquo and has him murdered.

Macduff - a general in Duncan's army who becomes suspicious of Macbeth's part in the king's murder. Macduff flees to England to encourage Malcolm to fight against Macbeth and seize his rightful crown. When Macbeth murders Macduff's entire family, Macduff swears personal revenge against the tyrant and succeeds in beheading him during battle.

The Three Witches - the personification of evil who prophesy that Macbeth will become the King of Scotland, planting the seed of greed in his mind. They later predict his downfall.

Minor Characters

Donaldbain - Duncan's youngest son who flees to Ireland after his father's murder and does not return.

Lennox - one of Duncan's nobles who accompanies Macbeth to Duncan's chambers after his murder. Lennox is suspicious of Macbeth and fearful for Scotland.

Ross - a Scottish noble and cousin to Macduff. He brings the good news of Macbeth's military victory and the bad news about Macduff's murdered family.

Siward - Earl of Northumberland and veteran military officer; he becomes an ally of Malcolm and Macduff and leads the first attack against Macbeth's forces.

Young Siward - the son of Siward who follows his father to fight against Macbeth in Scotland; he is killed in battle.

Seton - the only remaining officer in Macbeth's army that remains loyal to him.
**Hecate** - the queen of the witches.

**CONFLICT**

**Protagonist:** Macbeth as the personification of greed and resulting evil. He kills the king to seize the throne for himself and continues to murder to protect himself from discovery.

**Antagonist:** His conscience and guilt, which are his undoing (and the forces of good at work)

**Climax:** At the banquet scene (at mid point in the play), Macbeth can no longer hide his torment and guilt and incriminates himself saying "Thou canst say I did it." From this point forward in the play, there is no hope for Macbeth. His mind and his country sink into chaos. It is obvious that he is beyond the point of recovery, and his story will end tragically.

**Outcome:** The play ends in tragedy, for the main character loses his battle with himself. Since the main character is the personification of greed and evil, the theme of the play indicates that evil will not prevail.

(A more simplistic way to view the conflict is to name Macbeth as the protagonist and the good people of Scotland, specifically in the persons of Malcolm and Macduff, as the antagonist trying to overthrow an evil king. If viewed in this manner, the climax is then delayed until the point when Macduff actually murders Macbeth in the closing scene of the play.)

**PLOT**

Macbeth is a tragic play about a man who lusted after power, stole the throne of Scotland from the rightful Prince Malcolm, and threw the country into chaos through his evil reign. In the end, his own greed and guilt defeat him. Ironically, at the beginning of the play, Macbeth has everything going for him. He is an honored and valiant Scottish warrior who has just won his greatest battle and the title of Thane of Cawdor. Unfortunately, shortly after the battle, he meets three evil witches who sow the seed of greediness in his soul when they predict he will become the King of Scotland.

Macbeth, encouraged and manipulated by his even greedier wife, murders King Duncan in order to seize the throne for himself. But the stolen crown gives him no pleasure, for he is riddled with guilt over the murder and fearful of being discovered. In order to protect himself and his throne, he kills his good friend Banquo, whom he has begun to fear most of all. The two murders on his conscience are more than he can sanely bear, and at a banquet, attended by all the lords and ladies of the land, he thinks he sees the ghost of Banquo sitting in his chair. He claims to the assembled crowd that "Thou canst say I did it," and clearly incriminates himself of murder. No longer a rational man, he rants and raves, hallucinates, kills the family of Macduff for no reason, and throws all of Scotland into fear and chaos.

Tortured by himself to madness, the king returns to the three witches to find out his future. The evil ones warn him of Macduff (who later beheads the king in battle), tell him he will be harmed by no man born of woman (but Macduff was untimely ripped from the womb, not born), and promise he will not be vanquished until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane (which happens when the rebel soldiers camouflage themselves with the branches of Birnam as they march to attack the king). Macbeth, ironically, perceives these prophesies as positive ones, but they are still no balm to his chaotic, tortured soul. In the most famous words of the play, offered by Macbeth after he finds out his wife has killed herself, the evil king reveals the total emptiness of life, which is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."
The noble Macduff, heartsick over the state of affairs in Scotland, goes to Malcolm, who has fled to England, and encourages him to fight Macbeth in order to gain the throne which is rightfully his. He learns that Malcolm has already assembled 10,000 English soldiers who are ready to fight Macbeth. The English forces, coupled with the Scottish rebels, attack the mad king and the pitiful forces that still support him. The Scottish loyalists are easily overcome, and Macduff personally beheads Macbeth in revenge for the murder of his family. The play ends with the promise that goodness will prevail in the person of Malcolm and that order and reason will replace the chaos found in Scotland under the reign of the greedy, evil Macbeth.

**THEMES**

**Major Theme**

Evil begets evil, but evil will not prevail. Macbeth's own lust for power, fueled by his wife's greed, brings about murder and mayhem; but in the end, the evil leads to Macbeth's undoing and downfall so that Malcolm, the rightful leader, can return peace and order to the Kingdom.

**Minor Theme**

Be on guard against appearances; they sometimes seem as real as reality itself. Throughout the play, Macbeth has trouble distinguishing between truth and appearances, and this confusion contributes to his fear and ultimate downfall.

**MOOD**

Dark, brooding, and evil as developed by the four supernatural witch scenes, Macbeth's sick mind, and the chaotic state of affairs in Scotland.

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

William Shakespeare is usually considered the greatest dramatist and finest poet the world has ever known. No other writer's plays and poetry have been produced so many times or in so many countries or translated into so many languages. One of the major reasons for Shakespeare's popularity is the variety of rich characters that he successfully creates, from drunkards and paid murderers to princes and kings and from inane fools and court jesters to wise and noble generals. Each character springs vividly to life upon the stage and, as they speak their beautiful verse or prose, the characters remind the viewers of their own personalities, traits, and flaws. Shakespeare also made his characters very realistic. The dramatist had an amazing knowledge of a wide variety of subjects, and his well-developed characters reflect this knowledge, whether it be about military science, the graces of royalty, seamanship, history, the Bible, music, or sports.

In Shakespeare's time, few biographies were written, and none of the literary men of the Elizabethan Age was considered important enough to merit a book about his life. The first portfolio of his works, collected as a memorial to Shakespeare by members of his own acting company, was not published until 1623, seven years after his death. His first biography was written one hundred years later. As a result, many of the facts of Shakespeare's life are unknown. It is know that he was born in Stratford-on-Avon in England, sometime in early 1564, for his Baptism is recorded on April 26 of that year. His mother Mary had eight children, with William being the third. His father, John Shakespeare, was a fairly prosperous glovemaker.
and trader who owned several houses in Stratford and became the town's mayor when Shakespeare was a
boy. The young Shakespeare probably studied in the local grammar school and hunted and played sports
in the open fields behind his home.

The next definite information about William Shakespeare is that the young man, at age 18, married Anne
Hathaway, who was 26, on November 28, 1582. In 1583, it is recorded that Anne gave birth to their oldest
child, Susanna, and that twins, Hamnet and Judith, were born to the couple in 1585. By 1592, the family
was living in London, where Shakespeare was busy acting in plays and writing his own dramas. From
1592 to 1594, the plague kept most London theaters closed, so the dramatist turned to writing poetry
during this period, and his poems, which were actually published unlike his plays, became popular with
the masses and contributed to his good reputation as a writer. From 1594 to the end of his career,
Shakespeare belonged to the same theatrical company, known first as Lord Chamberlain's Men and then
as the King's Company. It is also known that he was both a leader and stockholder in this acting
organization, which became the most prosperous group in London, and that he was meeting with both
financial success and critical acclaim.

In 1594, Shakespeare was popular enough as an actor to perform before Queen Elizabeth. By 1596, he
owned considerable property in London and bought one of the finest houses in Stratford, known as New
Place, in 1597. A year later, in 1598, he bought ten percent of the stock in the Globe Theatre, where his
plays were produced. In 1608, he and his colleagues also purchased The Blackfriars Theatre, where they
began to hold productions during the winter, returning to the Globe during the summer months.
Throughout the rest of his life, Shakespeare continued to purchase land, homes, and businesses. He
obviously was a busy man between handling his business ventures, performing on the stage, and writing
or collaborating on the thirty-seven plays that are credited to him.

Shakespeare's most productive years were from 1594 to 1608, the period in which he wrote all of his great
tragedies, such as Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear. During these fourteen years, he furnished his
acting company with approximately two plays annually. After 1608, it appears he went into semi-
retirement, spending more time in Stratford and creating only five plays before his death on April 23,
1616. He was buried before the altar in the Stratford Church, where his body still lies today. Many literary
students and visitors make a pilgrimage to this shrine each year in order to honor William Shakespeare,
still recognized after 400 years as the world's greatest poet and dramatist.

MACBETH - THE DRAMA

Shakespeare based his play Macbeth on three actual historical events. King Duff of Scotland was
murdered by Donwald in 967. Almost a century later, Macbeth seized the Scottish throne, in 1040, after
killing Duncan I. Macbeth actually reigned until 1057 when Malcolm III, eldest son of Duncan I, killed
Macbeth and succeeded him, after several months, as King of Scotland. Shakespeare created his play
about Macbeth on a distorted version of the historical events which he studied in Raphael Holinshed's
Chronicles of Scottish History. The only pure, historical truth in the entire play is Duncan's death at the
hand of Macbeth.

Shakespeare obviously gathered much information from Holinshed. The Chronicles state that King Duff
found some of his nobles guilty of witchcraft and had them murdered. Donwald, who had friends killed by
the king, began to resent King Duff and, with his wife's help, arranged to have the king murdered at Forres
by four of his servants. After King Duff's murder, it is recorded that the sky remained dark for days, and
that storms and evil omens were frequent. During this period of darkness, many lords grew suspicious of
Donwald's part in the king's execution, because Donwald tried to act too innocent. Shakespeare revised
many of the facts surrounding Duff's death and incorporated them into his play about Macbeth.

It is also recorded in The Chronicles that King Duncan and King Macbeth were cousins by blood, but they were very different by nature. Duncan was a kind king without a backbone. Macbeth, on the other hand, was described as a valiant, but cruel, gentleman. Holinshed also records that Macbeth and Banquo battled and defeated the King of Norway and actually encountered three strange women who made predictions about their future. It is also noted that Macbeth grew resentful of King Duncan when he named his eldest son Malcolm as heir to the throne, for Macbeth had hoped to gain the crown for himself. As a result, Macbeth, with the help of his friend Banquo, kills Duncan in 1040 and names himself King of Scotland. Duncan's sons, in fear, actually flee to England and Ireland.

For ten years, King Macbeth reigned as a decent ruler, but then, fearing the knowledge of his friend and accomplice, he hired murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance, who actually managed to escape the murderers. After Banquo's murder, Macbeth's fears increased, and he began to regularly have nobles put to death in order to calm his fears and to seize their possessions. Among those killed were Macduff's family. With Macduff's encouragement, Malcolm attacked King Macbeth and murdered him. A few months after Macbeth's death, Malcolm III became the King of Scotland.

Obviously, Shakespeare mixes the history of Donwald and Macbeth in creating his main character in Macbeth. He also changes the character of Banquo from an actual accomplice in Duncan's murder to a noble lord that is the perfect contrast to the evil Macbeth. Shakespeare also develops King Duncan in the play as a much stronger and more likable king than he actually was, once again to make his Macbeth seem more wicked. He also develops Lady Macbeth in much more detail than Lady Donwald and dramatically compresses the time frame of the entire play. All of these changes to the historical facts, recorded in Holinshed's The Chronicles of Scottish History, were made by Shakespeare to heighten the impact of his dramatic presentation of Macbeth and to create the perfect tragedy.

SCENE SUMMARIES WITH NOTES

ACT I, SCENE 1

Summary
This very short scene immediately sets the dark, evil, somber mood of the entire play. Three witches have gathered in an open field near a battle site in Scotland during a dark thunderstorm. The three of them agree to meet again "upon the heath" to greet Macbeth, the main character of the play. At the end of the short scene, they all cry in their cackling voices, "Fair is foul, and foul is fair", which foreshadows the foulness of the play's plot and the difficulty of distinguishing between appearance and reality.

Notes
The three witches introduce and personify the ugliness and evil which pervades the entire play. During their evil planning, they also introduce the main character, Macbeth. Their language foreshadows the utter doom that is to come out of "the filthy air" that surrounds Macbeth. The opening setting, in a dark field haunted by thunder and lightning, is the perfect place for three grotesque creatures to discuss the evil that they predict. One of the witches asks, "When shall we three meet again?" This question addresses the urgency of time, which is apparent throughout the play. The quick pace of the drama is set in this brief scene with an indication that the meeting with Macbeth will occur quickly before "the set of the sun," but after the "battle is lost and won."
ACT I, SCENE 2

Summary
This short scene is set in King Duncan's camp and further introduces the main character Macbeth. An unnamed sergeant, bleeding from battle wounds, comes into camp and reports on the progress of the fighting, mentioned earlier by the witches in Scene 1. The brave Macbeth has won the battle and killed the rebel Macdonwald and "fix'd his head upon our battlements." But as soon as this victory is won, Sweno, the Norwegian King, sees an advantage as the enemy celebrates and launches a fresh assault upon Macbeth and his army. Macbeth and Banquo withstand the attack and "redoubled strokes upon the foe" to win another victory.

After completing this report to Duncan, the soldier departs to tend his wounds, and the Thane of Ross, a loyal Scottish nobleman, enters to greet the king. He comes from Fife and brings further news of the fighting. He reports that the Thane of Cawdor has become a traitor and joined forces with the King of Norway in the battle against Macbeth, but "the victory fell on us," and the Norwegian King was made to pay 10,000 dollars. King Duncan is furious at the news about the Thane of Cawdor and orders his execution. The title of Thane of Cawdor will be given to Macbeth as a reward for his heroism in battle.

Notes
This scene is in sharp contrast to the previous scene of darkness, doom, and cryptic planning. This setting, in the King's camp, is bright with the color of military costumes and regal clothing. It is also heroic in nature and direct in conversation and planning, in further contrast to the opening scene. The location of the camp is close to the battlefront, as indicated by the opening sound of alarm and the presence of a soldier still bleeding from recent fighting. The real significance of the scene is to further introduce Macbeth and reveal the King's attitude that he is a hero to be honored. But the scene is also filled with ironies and foreshadowing that should be noted. Macbeth and Banquo are described as "two spent swimmers", a strange description for battle heroes, but a perfect foreshadowing of their later deaths. Macdonwald is beheaded in the scene and foreshadows the later murder of Macbeth when his head is carried on a pole for all to see. There is irony related to the title of Thane of Cawdor. The original traitor to the King, the Thane of Cawdor, is executed, and Macbeth is given his title; later, as the second Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth becomes the traitor to the King and murders him; in due time, Macbeth is also executed like the original Thane of Cawdor. Ross, the Scottish nobleman in the scene, bears good news about the battle and is sent to give Macbeth the good news about his new title; later in the play he bears bad news to Malcolm and Macduff about the murder of Macduff's family. Finally, King Duncan celebrates Macbeth as a hero in this scene; later in the play, Macbeth will murder Duncan and celebrate his own ascension to the throne.

ACT I, SCENE 3

Summary
This scene is the culmination of the witches' prediction in Scene 1, where they promised to meet Macbeth "ere the set of sun" and "when the battle's lost and won". It also furthers the theme that runs throughout the play -- that everything is not always as it seems - that appearances lie. The three horrid creatures from Scene 1 have met again on a heath, an unproductive barren waste of land, close to the recent battlefront. Once again the "weird sisters" are stirring up their magic while holding hands and dancing round and round 9 times. One of the witches says she has been out killing swine and another says she has been putting a curse on a sailor's wife who refused to give her some chestnuts to eat. During this somber scene, the witch vows to destroy the sailor, as punishment to the wife, by depriving him of sleep and draining him "dry as hay", much as Macbeth will later be drained. As the witches cackle out their magic spells, a
drum roll is heard, and Macbeth and Banquo enter. It is ironic that the first words that the reader hears Macbeth speak in the play are an echo of the words of the three evil witches in the first scene. The main character enters and says to Banquo, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen." On the surface, Macbeth is pointing out the contrast of the foul weather, plagued by darkness and thunderstorms, and the glory of his fair victory over the enemy. At a deeper level, his words predict the true foulness of his soul that will be revealed throughout the play. It is Banquo who first describes the witches as "withered and wild in their attire" and who don't look "like inhabitants of the earth, and yet are on it." He notices their horrible skinny lips, their chappy fingers, and their beards, which make them appear to be men, and yet they are not. It is also Banquo who first speaks to them by asking, "Live you or are you aught?" In turn, Macbeth asks the witches to speak. They respond by hailing Macbeth three times and by greeting him as something he is not -- the Thane of Cawdor (which he soon will become) and the future king (which he will become in the course of the play). Macbeth is shocked at the witches' words, and Banquo begs to hear about his own future. The witches then offer predictions that reinforce the appearance vs. reality theme of the play. They tell Banquo that he will be "lesser than Macbeth and greater" and "not so happy, yet much happier". They also foretell that he shall beget kings. Macbeth is shocked at the accuracy of the witches' words and asks, "Can the devil (in the form of 3 witches) speak true?" Macbeth's reaction is to question how two men can bear the same title, which point Angus explains that Cawdor is to be executed (much like King Duncan and Macbeth). Then Macbeth turns to Banquo and says he cannot believe that the witches spoke such truth. He is already beginning to think of the third greeting as the future king and is wondering how he can make such a prediction come true. Banquo warns him that evil (in the form of the witches) only speaks half truths in order to stir up trouble and to make appearance seem like reality. Macbeth ignores Banquo's warning and thinks more about becoming king, which bodes both good (having the power) and ill (having to kill the king to gain the power). He ends his musing (that comes in his first spoken soliloquy) by saying, "Nothing is but what is not", which succinctly summarizes the appearance versus reality theme. At the end of the scene, Macbeth chides himself into believing that he will not take evil action against the king but let fate take its own course.

Notes
This scene is very important to the play in many ways. The reader is introduced to Macbeth in person for the first time-- in the very appropriate setting of a barren wasteland peopled by supernatural characters involved in casting evil spells. The witches, in their wickedness, predict that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland and, thus, sow the seed of greed in Macbeth that leads to his own ruin. At first Macbeth dismisses the witches' words as impossible gibberish, until Ross and Angus arrive and tell him that he has been named Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan as a reward for his valor in battle. This leads Macbeth to believe he will also become king, as the witches predict, and his mind immediately has thoughts of murder, a portent of what is to come in the play. There are other foreshadowings in the scene. The sailor's wife causes her husband's downfall, much as Lady Macbeth will cause her husband's downfall. The sailor will be "tempest-tost" and deprived of sleep, just as the reader finds Macbeth later in the play. The scene also does much to advance a key theme in the play - the confusion between appearance and reality: what seems to be is not always so. The witches themselves seem real enough and then vanish into thin air. Their predictions for Macbeth seem impossible and then he finds he really is the
Thane of Cawdor. Macbeth's imagination, driven by his ambition, makes what is not possible seem like a real possibility as he pictures himself murdering the king and seizing the throne. When Banquo explains Macbeth's preoccupation during the scene, he says that the Thane's "new garments" (referring to his becoming the Thane of Cawdor) do not fit well. In reality, the idea that has preoccupied Macbeth is how to put on even greater garments - a crown and royal robes. A sense of chaos also pervades the scene from the witches' dancing and chanting at the beginning to Macbeth's mind wandering to murder and mayhem near the end of the scene. This sense of chaos and doom sets the mood of the entire play with Scotland ripped apart by war and treachery and Macbeth and his wife ripped into frenzy by greed and guilt. The scene ends with Macbeth fooling himself into believing that he will let fate take its course rather than the reality of his shaping his own future and demise.

ACT I, SCENE 4

Summary
This scene takes place at King Duncan's palace at Forres. The king has arrived with his oldest son Malcolm, his youngest son Donaldbain, the nobleman Lennox, and other attendants. Duncan asks if Cawdor's execution has taken place. Malcolm replies that he has been told that Cawdor confessed his treasons, begged forgiveness, and died honorably. Duncan calls him a gentleman "on whom I built an absolute trust," much as he trusts Macbeth. That irony is underlined by the King's spoken insight that you cannot know a man's construction by looking at his face; in other words, appearance is not always reality. When Macbeth and Banquo arrive with Ross and Angus, Duncan greets the new Thane of Cawdor as "worthiest cousin" and thanks both him and Banquo for their loyal service. He says to Macbeth, "I have begun to plant thee, and will labour to make thee full of growing." The king then promises to reward Banquo in a similar manner to Macbeth.

Duncan then thickens the plot by naming Malcolm the Prince of Cumberland and the heir to the throne. In a spoken aside, Macbeth bemoans that this action lies in his way and then hopes that no one sees his "black and deep desires." Since Duncan is coming to visit Macbeth at Inverness, he knows that an opportunity presents itself, and time is of the essence in order to plan for the king's undoing. Macbeth takes leave to go and tell his wife the news of the royal visit (and to plot with her against Duncan). After his departure, the king continues his praise of the new thane ironically saying he is a "peerless kinsman". (It is true that Macbeth is like no other!)

Notes
The mood of this scene is sharply different than the previous one on the somber heath. The king is in his palace, surrounded by his kin and nobles. He is obviously delighted with Macbeth's victory, which has put him in high spirits. Even the news of Cawdor's execution has a positive impact, since he has died with dignity, asking for the king's pardon of his treason. (Macbeth's later execution will not carry such dignity.) The king openly states how hard it is to recognize a traitor, ironic words spoken right before Macbeth enters the palace. The words are made even more meaningful when the kind king calls Macbeth "worthiest cousin" and heaps praise upon this seemingly loyal servant. Macbeth's ironic answer to Duncan is that "our duties are to your throne," words spoken by a man who does not understand real duty at all.

The king then announces that his oldest son Malcolm has been named Prince of Cumberland and successor to the throne. This should be a joyous announcement for all, for it will insure that Scotland will have a smooth transition, but it is horrifying news to Macbeth. Malcolm is now a real stumbling block to his plan to gain the crown. In his aside, he acknowledges that he has evil desires which he must hide. His thoughts are made to seem even darker in contrast to the kindness and joy displayed by the good king.
throughout the scene. With dark thoughts in mind, Macbeth leaves to go to Inverness and prepare for the king's visit (and murder).

ACT I, SCENE 5

Summary
This scene, set in Macbeth's castle Inverness, opens with Lady Macbeth reading a letter from her absent husband. In the letter, Macbeth tells about his encounter with the three witches whom he believes have "more than mortal knowledge." He tells her about their prediction that he would become the Thane of Cawdor (which has come to pass) and the King of Scotland. Macbeth further indicates in the letter that he truly believes he will gain the throne, saying to his wife that he wanted her to know "what greatness is promised thee." Lady Macbeth is elated by the prospect of becoming the queen, but fearful that her husband may be too kind to carry out any plan that would insure he wears the crown. She immediately decides that she will help her husband by encouraging him to murder Duncan.

As she ponders all the news of Macbeth's letter and her husband's character, an attendant enters to say that King Duncan is coming to Inverness this very day for an overnight visit. Her response to the news is that she welcomes "the fatal entrance of Duncan under my battlements." She sees this as the perfect opportunity to have her husband murder the king. She begs the spirits to aid in the plan and to fill her with "direct cruelty" so nothing will "shake my fell purpose." As she has these darkest thoughts, Macbeth himself enters the scene, and she greets him as a king, calling him the "all-hail hereafter." She wastes no time in sharing her murderous thoughts about taking immediate action against Duncan and says, "I feel now the future is in the instant." When Macbeth tells her that Duncan will only be staying one night and leaving tomorrow, Lady Macbeth replies that "never shall sun that morrow see!" Then she warns Macbeth that he cannot let his plans for murder show in his face. Instead, he must "look like the innocent flower but be the serpent underneath." Next Lady Macbeth indicates that she wants to be in control of the plans, telling her husband to "put this night's great business into my despatch." Macbeth understands and approves her plans and promises to speak further about them later in the day. The scene closes with Lady Macbeth telling Macbeth to stay calm and "leave the rest to me."

Notes
Macbeth's letter to his wife reveals more information about the main character. He is obviously thoughtful and loving towards his wife, caring enough to write the letter to her and sharing his deepest thoughts and emotions with her. He also addresses her in the letter as "dearest partner in greatness," which shows his respect and appreciation for her. The letter also confirms Macbeth's greed, for he indicates to her his desire for the throne. After reading the letter, Lady Macbeth shares her fear in a soliloquy, saying that her husband may be "too full of the milk of human kindness" to plan a murder of the king, but she vows to pour her evil spirits into his ear. To aid her, she calls upon the dark spirits, as if praying to them, like the witches. She begs the "murdering ministers" to "unsex" her (much as the three evil witches seemed both male and female) and make her strong enough to murder. She also asks them to make her blood thick against remorse and compunction and to make the night dark to hide the sin that is to be committed. The wording of the entire soliloquy serves as a flashback to the first scene of the play, where the witches plotted their evil doings in a place where the air was foul and dark.

The scene also serves to introduce the character of Lady Macbeth, and a stormy character she is! Her immediate response to Macbeth's letter is that, beyond a doubt, her husband will become King of Scotland, for she will take matters into her own hands to make certain that it happens. When she learns that Duncan is on his way to Inverness for the night, without hesitation, she plans his murder in her own
castle. She even calls upon the darkness and smoke of hell to surround her in the night so she will not see the knife wounds or face the reality of her total evil. It is apparent that she will be the driving force behind her husband, nullifying any of his virtues, and she will do it quickly, reinforcing the frantic, chaotic pace of the entire play.

When Macbeth arrives and she shares her plans with him, she sees that "milk of human kindness" on his face and warns him not to let his treachery show to the king. When she tells him to look as innocent as a flower but act like a serpent, she recalls Duncan's earlier comments about the difficulty of recognizing a traitor by his face. Her observations about Macbeth also point out another one of the play's many ironies. Macbeth, the brave and victorious warrior, is really softer than his wife. Her warning also reinforces the ongoing theme of appearance vs. reality.

ACT I, SCENE 6

Summary
This short scene opens outside of Inverness Castle where King Duncan has arrived with his sons, Banquo, and other noblemen and attendants. The king admires the castle, and Banquo agrees that it is truly "heavenly". As they discuss the merits of the place, Lady Macbeth comes out to greet them, and pleasantries are traded between them. He then takes Lady Macbeth's hand and asks her to lead him to his host.

Notes
This scene is another one filled with irony, symbolism, and flashback. Duncan, in his praise of Macbeth's castle, ironically says that the air "nimbly and sweetly recommends itself," which is a sharp contrast to the foul and filthy air surrounding the witches in Scene 1. The irony lies in the fact that the air of Inverness is really more foul than any surrounding the three ugly creatures, for the plans of Macbeth and his wife are totally vile. Banquo adds further irony by pointing out the gentle bird (marlet) upon its nest and stating that the castle has "heaven's breath". This image of Inverness is in total contrast to the previous scene where Lady Macbeth calls upon a black raven and evil spirits and asks the "smoke of hell" to hide her evil deeds. The castle then takes on symbolic meaning to reinforce the conflict between good and evil in the play. Outside is light, bright, and pure, and inside the castle walls lurk darkness, doom, and evil.

The reality of Duncan's pleasant entry to Inverness is also in sharp contrast to Lady Macbeth's imagined fatal arrival of the king through "her battlements." Duncan, instead of in the image she painted, comes in peace and high spirits to arrive at a death scene that he does not suspect, much like he could not see the traitor in Cawdor. Things are not as they appear! This theme is further reinforced by Lady Macbeth's total hypocrisy in the scene. She greets Duncan with graciousness and praise while plotting his murder. She is the great pretender in a play of pretense and hypocrisy!

ACT I, SCENE 7

Summary
The scene opens with the solitary Macbeth wrestling with his thoughts of murdering the king, and he seems to be losing to his conscience. He is bothered that Duncan is his kinsman and that the execution would take place at Inverness when he should be serving as the king's kind host. He also reckons with Duncan's virtues: his kindness and his success in his position. He knows that the people support Duncan and will weep his loss. He ends his soliloquy by stating that only "vaulting ambition" makes him consider the evil deed; he has no complaint against the king, which makes the murder seem doubly vile to him. He is obviously vacillating between good and evil. Then Lady Macbeth enters and complains to Macbeth that
he has foolishly left the king at dinner. Macbeth's answer to her is a total shock, for he says, "We will proceed no further in this business." His wife unmercifully attacks his weakness saying that he is a fearful coward, a seeming ironic statement since Macbeth is an honored and valiant warrior who has just come from his ultimate victory. But it is obvious that his wife's words have affected him. He tries to protest by saying, "I dare do all that may become a man; who does do more is none." This answer causes Lady Macbeth to issue a new tirade against him. When Macbeth questions her about the possibility of failure in the deed, she laughs and says, "We will not fail." She then proceeds to tell her husband how Duncan will be murdered and how she will make his two chamberlains appear to be guilty. She will get the guards drunk with wine, and Macbeth will stab Duncan while he is unguarded. Then they will smear the king's blood on the innocent chamberlains. Macbeth, against his better judgment, agrees to the plan saying, "I am settled and bend up." In other words, he gives in to the evils of his wife rather than listening to the counsel of his conscience. Macbeth ends the scene by saying, "false face must hide what the false heart doth know," a statement which serves as a flashback to Duncan's original statement about not being able to identify a traitor by his face.

Notes
This important scene further develops the characters of Macbeth and his wife. The reader sees the basic traits of kindness and loyalty in the husband as he argues with himself against murdering the king. He is also capable of dealing with reality and truth, for he knows that only his lust for power makes him even contemplate the murder of a kind and popular king. In the middle of the scene, it appears that Macbeth's good conscience will prevail, for he decides not to go through with his plan and tells his greedy wife that the murder is off. He has made his decision for several reasons. He truly sees Duncan as a good king and kinsman; he is fearful of the results of the murder, knowing the citizens of Scotland love and honor their king; he is also afraid that he and his wife may not be successful in culminating the plan, and the results of failure would be disastrous. His conscience also tells him that he will be forever plagued with guilt and will forfeit heaven if the murder occurs.

Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, displays no virtue or goodness, but becomes the personification of blatant evil and greed in this scene. When she hears of her husband's decision to call off the murder, she attacks his masculine ego, calling him weak and unmanly. She will not accept any of his excuses or procrastination. She is committed to the murder, eager to accomplish it quickly, and infatuated with being married to a king with its attendant power. She has "given suck and knows how tender 'tis to love the babe," but she would dash its brains out, if necessary, in order to obtain her goal. Only an extremely sick female could envision killing her own child, and yet she says she would gladly do it in order to become queen. At this point, Lady Macbeth appears devoid of emotion, "unsexed" as she had hoped. But the evil wife wins her battle. At the end of the scene, Macbeth recaptures his manhood in the eyes of his wife by again agreeing to the murder. The irony is that he has become very unmanly and weak by capitulating to his manipulative wife.

This scene, like those before it, further develops the tensions between good vs. evil and appearance vs. reality. Macbeth almost allows his evil plans to be destroyed by his good conscience, but his wife's total depravity is too strong for him to overcome. In this scene, goodness loses to evil. The appearance to the world is that Lady Macbeth is a gentle, mild female married to a strong, unwavering warrior. In reality, it is Lady Macbeth who is the stronger one, but stronger in evil and greed. The scene also reinforces the urgency of time seen throughout the play. Lady Macbeth is in a hurry and pushes the action forward with firm resolve, refusing to let her husband relax and enjoy being Thane of Cawdor or procrastinate about the king's execution. She wants her crown NOW!
ACT II, SCENE 1

Summary
This scene opens at Inverness around midnight with Banquo and his son Fleance having a last conversation before retiring to bed. Banquo comments on the darkness, saying that there are no stars out on this dreary night. He then tells his son that he is also dreary, for he has been afraid to sleep. He does not want to be haunted with bad dreams about the three wicked witches. Macbeth then enters the scene, and Banquo turns to him and issues praises for his hospitality. He also states that Lady Macbeth is a most kind hostess. Macbeth also learns that the king has gone happily to his bed for the night. Banquo then tells Macbeth about dreaming of the three weird sisters. Macbeth replies, "I think not of them," in direct contradiction to his actual thoughts. Next Macbeth asks for Banquo's loyalty should he become king. Banquo ironically answers that if it is honorable and free from evil, he will be supportive.

Banquo and Fleance depart for bed, and Macbeth is left by himself with his fears. He sees a vision of a dagger in front of him. He reaches out for it, but nothing is there --what seems real is only an appearance. He blinks his eyes to erase the image, but the dagger is still there and is now dripping blood. Still unable to grab it, Macbeth acknowledges that it is only a vision and that the "bloody business at hand" has clouded his reason. Then his thoughts in the soliloquy turn to the current bewitching hour of midnight when "wicked dreams abuse" and "witchcraft celebrates" and "the wolf howls." Macbeth, still resolved to the murder, hears a bell calling him to action. He turns to leave and says, "I go, and it is done." The murder is at hand; there is no more time for procrastination.

Notes
The pitch darkness of this scene recalls the opening scene of the play with the witches and also Macbeth's earlier wish (Act 1, Scene 4) that the stars would hide their fires so as not to reveal his black and deep desires. It is also set at midnight, a perfect time for an evil murder.

When Macbeth enters the courtyard, he learns from Banquo, a representation of goodness, that he, like Macbeth, has dreamed of the three witches. But Banquo, unlike Macbeth, curses his thoughts of them and their predictions. In response to Banquo's explanation, Macbeth lies and says that he has not even thought about the three weird sisters, when in truth they have been his constant companions since their encounter on the heath. Next Banquo praises Macbeth's hospitality. The host continues his lies by saying he wished he could have done more for the king (when in fact he has been planning his murder), but he had short notice of the visit. Then Macbeth boldly asks for Banquo's support if he should become king. Banquo answers that he will be supportive if it is honorable. Shakespeare, with this response, is foreshadowing that Banquo (goodness) will oppose Macbeth (evil) in the future, for nothing that Macbeth is planning is honorable.

After Banquo and Fleance depart, Macbeth is left alone with his guilty conscience. He struggles with a vision of an imaginary dagger before him, just as he has been struggling with using a real dagger. He reaches for the image of the dagger several times, but it is not there, just as the crown will never really be there when Macbeth reaches for it. His conscience will never let him settle into the throne.

The scene ends with the sounding of a bell. It is Lady Macbeth's signal that all is ready. It rings out Duncan's death knell.
ACT II, SCENE 2

Summary
Lady Macbeth enters and says aloud that the wine which "made them drunk hath made me bold." She has arranged everything for her husband. The servants have passed out from drinking too much, Duncan is sound asleep and unguarded, and she has left the daggers out for Macbeth to use. She says that if the king had not resembled her own father in his sleep, she probably would have killed him herself. Instead, Macbeth has done the dastardly deed. He comes in covered in blood and carrying the two murder weapons. He is visibly and understandably shaken. He thinks he has heard a voice crying to him, "Sleep no more, Macbeth does murder sleep", a foreshadowing of his future sleeplessness. Lady Macbeth interrupts his demented thoughts and warns him to wash up and take the daggers back to the crime scene. The troubled Macbeth answers, "I'll go no more; I am afraid to think what I have done; Look on it again I dare not." Lady Macbeth calls him a coward and takes the daggers back herself. As she departs from Macbeth, there is a loud and repeated knocking. This sound pushes Macbeth to a panic level. He looks at his hands and asks, "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand?" When Lady Macbeth returns, she chides her husband more, saying she would be ashamed to have a heart as white (cowardly) as his. She also leads him out towards their bedroom to wash up and change into nightgowns. As they leave, she warns her husband not to be lost "so poorly in your thoughts." His answer is "To know my deed, twere best not know myself." His guilt and fear have already commenced.

Notes
As Lady Macbeth nervously waits for her husband to return from executing the king, she hears an owl shrieking and calls it "the fatal bellman" announcing Duncan's death, just as the bell near Newgate Prison announces the execution of a prisoner. Then she hears a call from upstairs, and her nervousness turns to fear that Macbeth has bungled the murder. But soon Macbeth enters covered in blood and announces "the deed is done." The two engage in a dramatic, brief conversation that is very revealing about both characters. Macbeth is already racked with guilt and remorse; his wife again scorns every sign of his weakness. Macbeth looks at his bloody hands and says, "This is a sorry sight." Lady Macbeth scoffs and says "a foolish thought." Macbeth briefly explains how he tried to utter the word Amen, as if in prayer, but the word stuck in his throat. His wife retorts, "Consider it not so deeply" and "These deeds must not be thought; it will make us mad." Then Macbeth explains how he heard a voice crying, "Sleep no more, Macbeth does murder sleep." His conscience is already at work speaking to him and accurately predicting his fate. He will live in the darkness for which he once begged, and he will live in his own hell, separated from God. As Macbeth entertains these thoughts, his wife bemoans his fear saying, "You do unbend your noble strength to think so brainsickly of things." This brief, fast-paced conversation between husband and wife is like a chaotic dance (and a flashback to the evil witches) that heightens the dramatic impact of the scene.

Then Lady Macbeth takes charge, much like a mother to a frightened child, and tells her husband to wash the blood off his hands and take the daggers back to the room. Macbeth's true state of mind is then revealed in his answer, "I am afraid to think what I have done" (yet he can think of nothing else); "To look on it again, I dare not" (but it is constantly before his eyes). With no ounce of understanding or sympathy, Lady Macbeth (the personification of pure evil in this scene) calls her husband an infirm coward. She takes the daggers from her husband's hand and leaves to put them back upstairs. In her absence, there is loud knocking in the castle, and Macbeth falls to pieces, saying, "Every noise appalls me." He looks at his hands and asks if the great ocean could even clean the blood from them -- a question that is rhetorical in nature since Macbeth knows the blood will be washed away, but his soul can never be cleansed.
When Lady Macbeth returns, her hands, like Macbeth's, are also covered in blood from smearing the servants. She and her husband are blood partners in evil! But Lady Macbeth, unlike her husband, is not bothered by the sight of the blood (she was the more blood thirsty one, never swaying in her desire to have the king murdered). Instead, she mocks her husband saying she would be ashamed to have his white (cowardly) heart; ironically, a white heart would usually mean a pure heart, and Macbeth's heart is certainly not pure! She then says, in total contrast to Macbeth's imagery of washing his hands, that "A little water clears us of the deed." She has no remorse, no conscience, and naively claims that the hard part is over and that everything from here on will be easy for them. She then berates her husband once more for losing his courage and warns him to "be not lost so poorly in your thoughts." Macbeth guiltily replies "Twere best to not know myself." He is filled with self-hatred. Only the knocking at the door interrupts his thoughts, and it serves to cause further panic and to forewarn of the beating he will take throughout the rest of the play.

This scene, although short, is masterfully written. Once again the theme of appearance versus reality is developed. Macbeth lives in a world of appearances and imaginings (a voice calling him to sleep no more, the earlier imagined dagger); his wife lives in reality and practicality (the shrieking owl outside, the need for nightgowns). In this play, it is hard to know what is real and what is not. There is no doubt, however, that Duncan's murder is real. The reader is spared the details of the murder scene, but the understatement of the bloodied couple and murder weapons create vivid images. The brief conversation between husband and wife after the murder is perfectly developed to reveal the inner nature of the two characters. Macbeth is racked with remorse and guilt, while his wife continues to be cold and calculating. Macbeth cannot even entertain the thought of returning the daggers to Duncan's chamber and viewing the corpse; Lady Macbeth goes calmly back, thinking only of protecting herself and her husband. Even though Macbeth is despicable in his greed for power and his murderous action, Shakespeare has successfully created Lady Macbeth even more despicably.

ACT II, SCENE 3

Summary
The knocking that began in Scene 2 intensifies at the beginning of this scene. Finally one of the drunken porters awakens and comes to the door of the castle. He imagines he is opening hell's gate, and a number of sinners are outside waiting to come in, including a greedy farmer who hanged himself, an equivocator who "committed treason enough for God's sake," and an English tailor who was a thief. When the porter actually opens the door, he finds Macduff and Lennox, who have come to wake the king. As the porter humorously talks to the two of them about the effects of alcohol, Macbeth enters the scene and offers to lead them to Duncan's room. As they walk, Macduff ironically says to Macbeth of the king's visit that it must have been "joyful trouble." He then enters the king's chambers, leaving Lennox and Macbeth outside in conversation about last night's foul weather (a flashback to the foul weather on the witches' heath). Lennox explained that in his neighborhood there were lamentings, screeching owls (like the one Lady Macbeth heard right before the murder), earthquakes, and strange screams of death. The citizens said that such things were prophesies of "dire combustion and confused events" (referring to the chaotic, war-torn status of Scotland). Macbeth succinctly responds in perfect understatement, "Twas a rough night."

Their conversation is interrupted by the wild-eyed Macduff screaming, "Horror, horror, horror." He then reports Duncan's murder by saying, "Confusion (evil) hath made his masterpiece!...... Murder has broke ope the Lord's anointed temple." Macbeth and Lennox head off towards the king's room, and Macduff gives orders to sound the alarm to announce the murder and treason. The scene is chaos, but Lady Macbeth enters calmly and asks what is going on. Ironically, Macduff calls her, 'O, gentle lady' and
explains that he cannot tell her, for the news would "murder" her ears and gentleness. Banquo next enters and is told of the murder. Lady Macbeth pretends to overhear and exclaims, "What, in our house?"

Macbeth and Lennox return, and Macbeth, in total hypocrisy and trying to eloquently express his grief, speaks some of the greatest truth in the play. "Had I but died an hour before this chance (murder), I had lived a blessed time; for from this instant there's nothing serious in mortality (nothing worth living for)...grace is dead." As he concludes this speech, the king's sons, Malcolm and Donaldbain, enter and learn of their father's death, seemingly at the hands of his servants who were smeared with blood. Then Macbeth confesses to having killed both servants out of feigned fury over their murderous deed (but in reality to protect himself from being discovered). In order to diffuse the tension of the moment and to detract attention from her husband, Lady Macbeth, the great pretender, acts as if she has fainted. Banquo, the personification of goodness in the scene, takes charge. He tells the servants to tend to Lady Macbeth, and to the others he suggests that they all get dressed and then meet to discuss the situation and the next steps. Banquo closes by saying, "In the great hand of God I stand...to fight treasonous malice." The others all agree to meet, except for Malcolm and Donaldbain, who are going their separate ways to England and Ireland, in order to protect themselves from the traitor's hand.

Notes
The scene opens in comic relief from the drunken porter. It is the only humorous scene in the play and is purposefully placed to relieve audience tension between the actual murder and its discovery. When the porter is awakened from his stupor by the knocking, he thinks he is going to open hell's gate (an in truth he is, for his castle walls - from the moment of the murder to the play's end - is a living hell for Macbeth). The porter names the sinners who are waiting to enter, and each one possesses one of Macbeth's tragic flaws. The farmer is greedy (Macbeth is greedy for power); the equivocator is full of pretense and lies (Macbeth lies to others and, more importantly, to himself); and the tailor is a thief (Macbeth has just stolen Duncan's life). All three of these traits contribute to Macbeth's downfall and total ruin. His lust for power leads him to dream of being king and causes him to murder; but the most devastating flaw that destroys Macbeth is that he has lied to himself, believing he could kill and not be haunted. What appeared to be did not happen in reality!

When the porter opens the door, he discovers Lennox and Macduff, who have come to wake the king. The murder is about to be discovered, and "all hell is about to break loose." Macbeth is aware of what is about to happen. When he enters the scene to greet the newcomers, he is so tortured and fearful he can barely speak more than two words, unlike his usual eloquent self. The talk between him and Lennox is about last night's weather outside the castle, which paralleled the activities inside Inverness (inside the gates of hell). Lennox explains there were wailings, earthquakes, shrieking birds, and screams of death in his neighborhood during the night. These happenings are believed by the citizens to prophesy the chaos and disorder of Scotland (and as the reader knows, Macbeth's mind). The tongue-tied Macbeth can only offer a brief understatement of comment. "Twas a rough night." How different in language from Macbeth's earlier poetic soliloquies, but how perfect a response!

It is Macduff who discovers the murder and sounds the alarm. He tells everyone in the castle to "shake off death's counterfeit (sleep), and look on death itself!" Lady Macbeth is the first to arrive on the scene and plays the part of the great pretender, appearing gentle and innocent, the horrified hostess. Banquo arrives next and tries to calm everything down in order to get organized. How ironic that Lady Macbeth (a picture of total depravity) arrives on the scene with Banquo (a picture of innocence and goodness)! Macbeth than returns and launches into a lengthy speech (his first one in this scene). He is trying to show his sorrow over the king's murder by saying, "Had I but died an hour before this chance, I had lived a blessed time."
These words, addressed to the kin and nobles of the king, are filled with double meaning. Spoken to show Macbeth's grief to the world, they really refer to Macbeth's wish that he had not lived to kill Duncan and fall out of grace into the living hell of his own conscience. Lady Macbeth, knowing the real meaning of his words and fearful her husband will continue and incriminate himself, pretends to faint. Appearance vs. reality is rampant in the scene!

An analysis of Macbeth's words and their tone in this scene show the conflict of good and evil that rages in his soul. In the beginning of the scene, he is so scared and guilt-ridden he can barely speak. When Malcolm and Donaldbain join the others, they ask, "What is amiss?" Macbeth answers in an almost irreverent manner, "You are, and do not know it," meaning they no longer have a father to guide them, just as Macbeth feels he no longer has a God to protect him since he has sold his soul to hell. As Macbeth grows more fearful in the scene, he tries to hide it with his eloquence, but his words are incriminating him as his soul cries out. His last words in the scene, "Let's briefly (quickly) put on manly readiness," are an invocation to the others to do what he cannot do -- pull himself together as a man. How ironic for one who has just won honors as a valiant warrior! To intensify Macbeth's conflict, the scene is filled with a cacophony of sounds from the deafening knocking at the gate and the porter's loud, drunken speeches to Macduff's shouting "horror" and sounding the alarm to the final rush of people and conversation. Each auditory image reinforces the chaos that tortures Macbeth's soul.

ACT II, SCENE 4

Summary
This scene opens the next morning outside Macbeth's castle with Ross and an old man conversing about the tragedy that occurred in the last scene. The old man states that in his seventy years he has never known such dreadful times. Ross agrees and adds that heaven is showing its displeasure with mankind, for even though it is morning, "darkness does the face of earth entomb, when living light should kiss it." The old man agrees that the darkness is unnatural, just like the murder. He then adds that many other strange signs have been happening. Just last Tuesday a proud falcon (Duncan) was killed by a weaker mousing owl (Macbeth). Ross adds that also Duncan's tame, royal horses "turned wild in nature...as they would make war with mankind" (much as the whole of Scotland has turned wild in civil strife and war).

As this conversation goes on, Macduff enters and says that, like the weather, he is in a dark and dismal mood (a flashback once again to the three witches on the heath). When asked if anything else is known about the murder, Macduff says it is believed that the servants who killed the king were hired to do so, and Malcolm and Donaldbain are suspected since they have fled the country. Ross comments that for a son to kill his father is the most unnatural event. Then Macduff reveals that Macbeth has been chosen king and is already at Scone for his coronation, and Duncan's body has been taken to Colmekill, "the sacred storehouse of this predecessors" to be buried. Macduff is going home to Fife, but Ross plans to go to Scone for the coronation. Macduff departs saying "our old robes sit easier than our new!" He is obviously wary about Macbeth's being king. The old man closes the scene with a blessing, "God's benison go with you, and with those that would make good of bad and friends of foes!"

Notes
This scene is a quiet interlude after the storminess of the last one. But the weather is still dreary, indicating that the state of affairs is still dark and gloom. The old man, with whom Ross converses, is meant to be a representation of all the good people of Scotland who are horrified at the king’s execution and affected by it. Because he is obviously an older, religious man, he represents order, calm, and moderation amongst the chaos that swirls about him, just as Banquo had been calm and tranquil amongst the chaotic scene with the
witches. The old man's demeanor and attitude also help to quiet the frantic pace of the play. (Remember, it was only yesterday when Macbeth heard the witches' predictions.) The scene also give the audience a chance to relax for a moment before the play's tempo intensifies again.

At mid point in the scene, Macduff enters and announces that Macbeth will be crowned king at Scone, the ancient capital of Scotland. Shakespeare implies that there is some antagonism between him and Macbeth, for Macduff refuses to go to the coronation and openly states that old times under Duncan will probably be easier than the new times under Macbeth. Ross, on the other hand, seeks to gain Macbeth's favor and plans to go to Scone to see him crowned king. Macbeth has achieved his goal and satisfied his lustful greed. Shakespeare, however, has already foreshadowed that Macbeth will have "troubled joy" in wearing the crown as he tries to handle his guilty conscience, the country's unrest, and the suspicions of Macduff.

**ACT III, SCENE 1**

**Summary**

This scene opens at the palace at Forres with Banquo alone but speaking aloud to an absent Macbeth. He begins by saying, "Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all, as the weird women promised, and I fear thou play'dst most fouly for't." Then Banquo wonders if the witches' prediction for him will also come true, that he will become "the root and father of many kings." His thoughts are then interrupted by a trumpet as King Macbeth and the Queen enter with Lennox, Ross and other lords, ladies, and attendants. The king invites Banquo to the banquet he is holding this evening. Banquo accepts the invitation and tells Macbeth he is forever at his service as a man of duty. Then Macbeth asks Banquo a series of questions to find out what Banquo plans to do for the rest of the day and with whom. He then reports that "our bloody cousins (Malcolm and Donaldbain) are bestowed in England and in Ireland, not confessing their parricide." Macbeth then sends Banquo off for his planned afternoon ride and the others off to enjoy themselves until the dinner scheduled for 7:00.

Macbeth is left alone with his thoughts and, in a soliloquy, states that to be king is nothing unless the king is safe. And he does not feel safe with Banquo, for "He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour to act in safety...and under him, my genius is rebuked." He also expresses his jealousy that the witches have proclaimed that Banquo's sons will some day be kings instead of his future offspring. (Macbeth has no sons.) He then laments that "for them (Banquo's sons) the gracious Duncan have I murdered and put rancours in the vessel of my peace and given mine eternal jewel (his soul)...to the common enemy of man (the devil)." By the end of the soliloquy, Macbeth reveals that he must kill both Banquo and his son Fleance.

A servant then enters with two common murderers that Macbeth has sent for. Macbeth manufactures a story to convince the two of them that Banquo has treated them poorly, "whose heavy hand hath bowed you to the grave and beggared yours forever." Macbeth asks them how they could possibly forgive Banquo, to which they answer, "We are men, my liege." Macbeth then asks them to murder Banquo. One of the murderers answers by saying the he is "so incensed (about his lack of fortune) that I am reckless what I do to spite the world," and the other also agrees. Then Macbeth confesses that Banquo is truly his deadly enemy, but he cannot openly kill him because of mutual friends. He makes the two men promise to be cautious about conducting the murder, "masking the business from the common eye." The murderers promise to do as commanded. Macbeth tells them the murder must be committed on this very night away from the palace, and the son Fleance must also be killed. The murderers agree to the plan and exit to await further instructions from the king. Macbeth closes the scene by speaking to an absent Banquo saying, "It is concluded." Macbeth heaps murder upon murder, and torture upon torture to his soul.
Notes
This scene reveals much about the character Banquo. Although Banquo has been developed as a good and loyal man, he is not perfect. Like Macbeth, he is tempted by the witches' prophecies; but unlike Macbeth, he quells the temptations and even stays awake at night to avoid dreaming about them. He is a man in control and a loyal citizen of Scotland. Although he will serve the new King Macbeth, he does not trust him or how he came to the throne. The conversation between the two of them in this scene reveals Banquo's suspicions, and his cautious answers to the king are meant to be evasive.

The scene also reveals much information about Macbeth's state of mind. Although he has been crowned king (and his greed should be satisfied), he receives little pleasure from it, for "upon my head they placed a fruitless crown." Although this is a direct reference to the fact that he has no sons to be heirs to the throne, it also clearly indicates that the king has not even found "troubled joy" in the crown. He has grown very fearful about being discovered (his conscience at work) and about his safety. He has also grown jealous of anything that would stand in the way of his plans or his total power. During this scene, he directs all of this fear and jealousy towards Banquo, saying that next to him his own "genius is rebuked." He is also envious of Banquo because the witches have prophesied that his sons will become kings. During the conversation between the king and Banquo, it is obvious that the calculating Macbeth has some scheme in mind as he quizzes Banquo about his plans for the afternoon. In Macbeth's impassioned soliloquy that follows this questioning, Macbeth reveals his agitated state of mind and his great fear and jealousy of Banquo. He admits that he does not feel safe and "fears in Banquo stick deep." He knows Banquo has a "royalty of nature" that he cannot trust, and he has become intensely afraid that the witches prophesy about Banquo's sons will come true. Macbeth then bemoans the fact that he has sold his soul to the devil only for the benefit of Banquo's heirs. Therefore, his sick mind reasons, he must have Banquo and Fleance murdered in order for him to control the future and his own posterity. He easily, without conscience, plans this second murder; there is none of the indecision that he suffered when contemplating Duncan's execution. He has already sold himself to the devil.

Macbeth has sent for two murderers who are brought in by a servant. He poisons their mind against the good Banquo. Then with deceitful persuasion, flattery, and promise of favors, the king convinces the two of them that they hate Banquo and should kill him on this very day. When he has their promise of murder in hand, the mercurial Macbeth dismisses them abruptly. Macbeth has truly become the despicable tyrant, manipulating people and using his power to his own purpose. Unfortunately, he acts out of fear and jealousy, and everything he wants is now evil.

ACT III, SCENE 2

Summary
This scene opens with Lady Macbeth sending a servant to bring her husband to her. She is obviously lonely and curious to know what is going on. While she is waiting on the king's arrival, she reveals her concern for the brooding Macbeth and his fears. In a soliloquy, she states, "Tis safer to be that which we destroy than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy." She knows that her husband is too fearful to gain any pleasure from the crown, and she wants to try and calm him down. She is still the practical advice giver. When Macbeth arrives, she asks him, "Why do you keep alone of sorriest fancies your companions making? ... What's done is done." Macbeth explains that they have wounded the snake, not killed it. He admits to growing fears of retribution for his actions. He also claims that he would rather be dead than to endure the "torture of mind" he is feeling. Lady Macbeth, surprisingly, does not scorn his fearful words as earlier, but gently warns him to appear bright and jovial amongst the guests at dinner. He promises to disguise what is in his heart and asks her to pay special attention to Banquo during the meal. (Macbeth's
state of mind is so clouded and confused that he seems to have forgotten for the moment that Banquo should be murdered before the dinner.) She tells him to quit worrying about Banquo and Fleance, but the audience, like Macbeth, knows this is an impossibility. In fact, the king replies to his wife that his mind is "full of scorpions" and that "there shall be done a deed of dreadful note." When Lady Macbeth asks what is to be done, her husband leaves her in the dark, saying to her, "Be innocent of the knowledge till thou applaud the deed." He is in charge now, not his wife as in earlier scenes; he, however, is still confident that she will agree with the murders after they are accomplished and "applaud the deed." The scene ends with Macbeth once again asking for night to come quickly. This time he wants the darkness to "cancel and tear to pieces that great bond (Banquo) which keeps me paled."

Notes
This short scene reveals much about the relationship of the king and queen at this point in the play. Lady Macbeth, although still practical about their state of affairs, appears more kind and concerned than in previous scenes. She seems genuinely worried about Macbeth's brooding for two reasons that are partially selfish; she knows he is finding no joy in his new position because of his fear (and, in turn, depriving her of pleasure), and she is also afraid that his fear will cast suspicion upon both of them. She offers calm advice to Macbeth, prodding him to forget the past, saying "What's done is done." She obviously is not doing battle with her conscience. She has been able to easily "wash away the blood" as she suggested earlier. Lady Macbeth also warns her husband to put on a mask at dinner in order to hide his troubled heart from his guests. Her words are a flashback to Duncan's belief that you cannot see a traitor's heart in his face.

Macbeth, in complete contrast to his more tranquil wife, is a desperately haunted man (far from the image of the brave warrior of Act I). He is certain that they have only "scotched the snake", and he is determined to kill it (thus, his plans for the murders of Banquo and Fleance). He also lives in fear of being discovered throughout the day, and the darkness (which he has often called upon for protection) offers no relief since he is haunted at night by terrible dreams. There is now no relief for Macbeth; he cannot escape from himself.

It is important to note that Macbeth has plotted the murders of Banquo and Fleance by himself without the help of his wife, who was the plotter and planner of Duncan's murder. In fact, he does not even share his plans with her. He says he wants her to be "innocent of the knowledge," but in Macbeth's current state of mind, he has perhaps even begun to distrust his wife. There is certainly a new distance between them that Lady Macbeth has recognized.

Although the scene between husband and wife, the king and queen, is pleasant on the surface, the division between them can be seen. Macbeth is now operating on his own, the true royal tyrant. He seems to no longer need his wife's input as he did earlier, and the result is that he is hurling himself into even greater chaos at an alarming rate.

ACT III, SCENE 3

Summary
Outside the palace the original two murderers are joined by a third one sent by Macbeth. As the scene opens, the three of them are waiting for Banquo and Fleance to return from their ride in the countryside in order to carry out the murders plotted by the king. Banquo and Fleance enter on foot and converse about the weather. The dark, cloudy skies cause them to forecast rain. The murderers attack and stab Banquo first. He, in turn, screams to Fleance to "Fly, fly, fly! Thou mayst revenge (me)." Banquo dies, but his son escapes on foot into the darkness of the night. The murderers comment to one another that they "have lost
(the) best half of our affair," and depart to tell the king the bad news.

Notes
This brief scene furthers the plot by showing the bungled murder of Fleance and the death of Banquo. It does little to develop character or theme. A third murderer has been sent by the fearful Macbeth. The distrusting king obviously wants this one to check up on the other two. The three of them together, plotting murder in the dark, continue the development of the dreary, chaotic mood of the entire play and recall the three witches plotting Macbeth's own downfall. It is also significant to note that the weather is again turning foul. Banquo comments that, "It will be rain tonight."

Shakespeare obviously wants this scene clearly tied to Macbeth. The third murderer comes in and says the king has sent him. This reminds the audience that Macbeth was the one who planned these murders and gave the details of how they were to be committed - outside the palace, in the dark, when Banquo and Fleance had dismounted from their horses. On foot, there is less chance of escape, and yet Fleance has managed to run away into the darkness (ironically, the same darkness that Macbeth has often asked to hide him.) As a result of Fleance's escape, the audience knows that the witches' third prophecy, (the one about Banquo's sons becoming kings) is still a possibility, and suspense is built. After all, the first two prophesies, that Macbeth will become Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, have come to pass. The audience also realizes that Fleance's freedom will only add to Macbeth's growing paranoia. The chaos, begun in the very first scene and developed throughout the play, now intensifies again. Perhaps Banquo (goodness) will have his revenge!

ACT III, SCENE 4

Summary
This very important scene, filled with flashback, symbolism, imagery, and irony, takes place in the banquet hall of the palace, and opens with King Macbeth entering with his queen, nobles, lords, and attendants. In the beginning, all seems a picture of perfect order. The table is prepared, and Macbeth tells everyone to sit according to their rank from the top of the table downward. He then tells Lady Macbeth to stay seated in order to welcome the guests while he mingles with them. He seems a man in perfect control (an appearance that is in stark contrast to the reality of his inner being).

As he passes among the guests, the king spies the first murderer, who has just entered the hall. Macbeth tells him, "There's blood upon thy face." The murderer replies that it belongs to Banquo. After Macbeth praises the murderer for this work, the king learns that Fleance has escaped. It is Macbeth's undoing. He pales at the news and says, "Then comes my fit again," a foreshadowing of the real "fit" he is about to display in the banquet hall. The king tries to regain his composure saying that at least the "grown serpent" (Banquo) lies dead, and the smaller serpent (Fleance) is too young to fear today. But the news has visibly shaken Macbeth.

The first murderer leaves, and Lady Macbeth seeks out her husband to come and give the toast. As he salutes his guests, Banquo's ghost enters the hall, unnoticed by Macbeth, and sits in his chair. When it is time to seat himself, Macbeth sees there is not an empty place for him and says, "The table's full." Since the others cannot see the ghost of Banquo, they know something is wrong with the king. Matters grow worse when Macbeth points to the ghost and asks, "Which of you have done this?" Then he openly incriminates himself by denying his guilt: "Thou canst say I did it,"

The nobleman Ross, recognizing Macbeth's state of mind, tells everyone to rise to leave, but Lady Macbeth wants to be in control and save her husband. She tells everyone to stay seated and explains that
her husband often has "fits" and has had them since his youth. She further explains that "the fit is momentary; upon a thought he will again be well." She tells them that if they simply ignore him, it will pass. Then she turns on her husband and angrily asks, "Are you a man?" Macbeth answers that he is "a bold one (man), that dare look on that which might appall the devil." Lady Macbeth then ridicules him further, saying, "This is the very painting of your fear; this is the air-drawn dagger which...led you to Duncan." She ends this first tirade by saying, "Shame itself!" She takes up the verbal abuse against Macbeth again by attacking his male ego and calling him "quite unmanned in folly." This entire dialog serves as a flashback to the former Lady Macbeth, chiding her husband about his lack of courage to murder Duncan.

Macbeth then turns and challenges the ghost to speak, which causes the image of Banquo to temporarily depart. To himself, the king bemoans that "murdered men rise again....more strange than such a murder is." He tries again to regain his composure and cover up his damage by taking up his wife's story to the guests. He tells them, "I have a strange infirmity, which is nothing to those that know me." He then goes forth with a toast to all, but the ghost reappears to taunt him. Macbeth challenges the apparition to take any shape but that of a ghost, and he will battle and defeat it, brave words from a sick mind that recalls Macbeth's former self as a proud warrior.

Lady Macbeth turns on her husband again and chastises him for spoiling the party: "You have displaced the mirth, broke the good meeting." Then she turns to the guests and dismisses them, telling them to go out in any order. The well-planned, orderly banquet has dissolved into total chaos.

When the guests have departed, the King and Lady Macbeth have a brief conversation that clearly reveals the depth of Macbeth's tortured mind. He says of himself, "I am in blood, stepped in so far that returning were as tedious as go o'er." He fears that "blood will have blood," (sin will have its retribution), so he has put paid spies in the houses of all his nobles. Since Banquo is now dead, he turns his fear toward Macduff. He also says he will do whatever it takes to protect himself, for he is already in so deep it does not matter. He foreshadows further bloodshed when he says, "We are yet but young in deed." Two murders are behind him; more are to come. In order to find out his fate, Macbeth plans to go tomorrow to consult again with the three witches, the personification of evil that he now trusts. The audience can already imagine his future, but Lady Macbeth, lying to herself, says that a little sleep will cure her husband. The irony is that sleep escapes him. There is no respite from his tortured mind.

Notes
This extremely important, dramatic scene marks the turning point in the play. It is purposefully opened in sharp contrast with the last chaotic scene where Banquo is murdered and Fleance flees. The banquet hall is bright and organized, the table has been carefully set, the guests are seated by rank. Pleasant conversation flows, especially from the hypocritical queen, who is seated and greeting each guest. All is a picture of elegance and order; it, however, is a totally false appearance, for Macbeth is still in a chaotic state and will bring ruin to the banquet, just as he is bringing ruin to his life.

The calm of the banquet is first interrupted when the murderer appears. He is the first of two uninvited guests that totally unravel Macbeth and destroy the evening. The murderer still has Banquo's blood upon his face. (In reality, it is Macbeth who should bear the blood, just as he did after Duncan's murder.) The king learns from this intruder that although Banquo is dead, Fleance has escaped. This news puts Macbeth in a "fit", and he suddenly feels out of control and "cabined, cribbed, confined...to saucy doubts and fears." At least he is glad that the adult serpent (the good Banquo) is dead. (Note the irony in this image of Banquo as a snake and recall that earlier in the play Lady Macbeth told her husband to look innocent but
strike like a serpent.) Macbeth tries to regain his composure and toast the guests, but it, like the banquet, is a shallow, false appearance of order and control. Macbeth cannot hide the reality of his inner turmoil.

After the toast, Macbeth makes note of Banquo's absence (as if to cast guilt away from himself) and says how much he misses the presence of the noble (words full of double-meaning). On cue of hearing his name, the ghost of Banquo appears, the second uninvited guest of the evening that only Macbeth sees. The king points at the apparition in horror and accuses his guests by asking, "Which of you have done this?" He then incriminates himself publicly by denying any wrong doing: "Thou canst not say I did it." (And the truth of the statement and the lie to himself is that he did not actually commit the murder, but had it commissioned; the blood of Banquo, therefore, was on the uninvited guest, not him.) The irony of the moment lies in the fact that none of the other guests, not even Lady Macbeth, can see the ghost; neither do any of them know about Banquo's murder. They can only assume he is referring to Duncan's recent execution, and at this point in time the common belief is that it was accomplished at the hand of Malcolm and Donaldbain.

Lady Macbeth, in her old, controlling manner, tries to save the situation for her husband and herself by explaining to the guests that Macbeth has had "fits" since his youth. She claims they are always momentary in nature and insists that the guests stay seated for dinner, even though the nobleman Ross has suggested they all leave. The irony is that by keeping the guests in the banquet hall, she is insuring her husband's ruin. His fit is not momentary, but a true sickness of his soul that he can no longer hide. The confident Lady Macbeth, unknowing of her husband's latest blood letting, is certain that through her typical chiding, she can bring her husband around. She begins by asking Macbeth, "Are you a man?", a question that always seems to get to him. (Remember, it is how she convinced him to carry through with Duncan's murder.) She then reminds him that all of his visions, such as the air-born dagger in an earlier scene, have been his imagination run wild, and she tries to convince him that this one is the same. She summarizes her tirade by saying that his folly is making him unmanly and closes by saying, "Shame on you," the image once again of a mother scolding her child. Later in the scene she pouts to Macbeth that he has spoiled the party, "displaced the mirth."

Macbeth seems to slightly recover during the course of the scene and is brave enough to challenge his wife. When she asks if he is a man, he answers that it is a bold man who can look at a ghost (a symbol of his conscience) and acknowledge that what he sees appalls the devil himself. He also complains to her that she makes him doubt himself (an ironic situation when she is trying to challenge him to manhood). Macbeth is also recovered enough to taunt the ghost by saying, "If thou canst nod, speak too." There is, in this image, a flickering hint of the old warrior, and Macbeth momentarily wins, for the apparition temporarily disappears. When the ghost returns, Macbeth challenges again, daring the figure to take any shape but a ghost, be it "the rugged Russian bear, the armed rhinoceros, or the Hycran tiger." Macbeth says he will gladly fight any of these forms without fear, or even fight Banquo in person if he will come back to life. Then the king finally orders the "horrible shadow" to depart. The irony is that Macbeth is really the "horrible shadow", a mockery of the hero he used to be. When the ghost leaves for the last time, Macbeth pathetically says, "I am a man again."

When Lady Macbeth realizes that her husband is not recovering from his strange behavior, she hastily dismisses the guests (as she should have done earlier when Ross suggested it). The scene quickly turns into an image of even greater chaos with the lords and ladies leaving without order and in loud conversation about what has just transpired. Shakespeare has written a masterful and dramatic scene, where the chaotic ending of the banquet is in total contrast to its orderly beginning, just as Macbeth is in total contrast to his former heroic self.
The symbolism and irony of the banquet scene is the essence of the entire play. Macbeth in the beginning of the play had it all. He was a true man -- a brave warrior who had just won his greatest victory, saved Scotland from ruin, and was honored by the king. He had much to look forward to, until the three evil witches planted a seed of greed in his mind. Suddenly, he had thoughts of being more than just Thane of Cawdor. In weakness, he let his even greedier wife really talk him into murder. His conscience had warned him against the plot, but he was manipulated by Lady Macbeth in an unmanly manner to do it anyway. So by appearing like a man in his wife's eyes, he had, in reality, thrown away his manhood. In this scene, Lady Macbeth is urging her husband to again become a man, when she had earlier begged him to destroy his manliness by ignoring his conscience and committing the murder. But his conscience has now stolen his self-respect, forever. He is a lost soul. His wife cannot save him, as she tries to do in this scene; he can only save himself. Ironically, he has become too unmanly to do that, as clearly demonstrated in the banquet scene. As a result, from this point forward in the play, the audience will watch Macbeth as he totally unravels himself to ruin.

**ACT III, SCENE 5**

This scene takes place once again on a heath with thunder in the background. The three witches of earlier scenes enter and meet their queen, Hecate (the goddess of witchcraft) who appears to be angry. She explains, in rhyming couplets, that her wrath is due to the witches' failure to consult with her:

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...............How did you dare
    To trade and traffic with Macbeth
    In riddles and affairs of death;
        And I, the mistress of your charms,
    The close contriver of all harms,
    Was never called to bear my part,
        Or show the glory of our art?
    And, which is worse, all you have done
        Hath been but for a wayward son,
        Spiteful and wrathful, who (as others do)
        Loves for his own end, not for you.
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In continuing verse, Hecate instructs the witches to meet her tomorrow morning at the pit of Acheron (the gates of Hell) where Macbeth will join them to learn his future. She instructs them to bring their cauldrons and be ready to conjure up their magic spells that will "draw him on to his confusion." Then Hecate suggests that Macbeth will continue to "spurn fate, scorn death." Things do not look good for the King of Scotland!

**Notes**

There is considerable controversy about this scene in the play, and no definitive answer about its authorship. Some scholars believe it was not part of the original drama, but was inserted at some later date by some playwright other than Shakespeare. The scene itself would support that belief. Shakespeare was a master of verse, and by any stretch of the imagination, these rhyming couplets do no reach a high poetic plateau; but perhaps the triteness of the verse is intentional. After all, Hecate, the queen of witches and evil, is the speaker. High poetry would seem inappropriate issuing forth from her wicked mouth.

The scene, however, does not seem to fit properly into the play. It has none of the mystery, somberness, or dramatic impact of the previous two witch scenes. In addition, very little new information is gained in the scene. If the play is read without including this scene, no plot information is missed, for the audience...
learns at the beginning of the next act where Macbeth actually meets the witches and what he hears directly from them. The characters of the three witches are not further developed in the scene; it is only Hecate who is introduced and shown, as to be expected, as a demanding, harsh, and evil witch queen.

If Shakespeare indeed was the originator of the scene, its purpose would be two-fold: 1) to tightly bind the structure of the play by having this scene, at mid point in the drama, be a clear flashback to the first and second witch scenes in the play, both of which occur early in Act I; and 2) to give some relief to the very rapid building of the plot, which reached a high point in the previous banquet scene. Shakespeare was capable of having originally written this scene, but it seems unlikely that in one of his shortest, most intense dramas, he would have created a supernatural scene with so little dramatic impact.

ACT III, SCENE 6

Summary
This short scene takes place at the palace at Forres, but its purpose is to give the audience information on the state of affairs outside the palace walls. The noble Lennox is conversing with an unnamed lord (a representation of all of the unnamed Scottish citizens) and states that as of late "things have been strangely borne." It is still generally believed that Malcolm and Donaldbain murdered Duncan, their father. In a like manner it is believed that Fleance killed Banquo since he also has fled.

Lennox, who speaks in a sarcastic tone, is not certain that Malcolm, Donaldbain, and Fleance are murderers. Their relative crimes are pinned on them because they have fled the country, but why wouldn't they flee to save their own lives in the face of imminent danger. Lennox also questions Macbeth's motives in killing Duncan's accused chamberlains, "for 'twould have angered any heart alive to hear the men (Duncan's servants) deny it (the murder)." Furthermore, Lennox doubts that drunken men could truly have committed the brutal execution. Lennox is also fearful for Malcolm, Donaldbain, and Fleance, for he believes that if Macbeth has the chance, he will kill them.

Lennox then changes the subject to Macduff, who he has heard lives in Macbeth's disgrace for missing the royal banquet. He asks the other lord if he knows the whereabouts of Macduff. The lord explains that he has gone to England to petition the "holy king" and to visit with Malcolm, the rightful heir to the Scottish throne. Malcolm, since his flight, has been living in the English court and is treated with grace by King Edward. Macduff is there to convince Edward to help in an insurrection against Macbeth, who has become a tyrant king that the citizens greatly fear. Macduff particularly wants the aid of the warlike Siward and his strong men of Northumberland. The lord then reports that Macbeth has heard about Macduff's petition to the English King and is preparing for war. He also tells how Macbeth sent for Macduff, but the nobleman curtly replied to the king, "Sir, not I." Lennox closes the scene by asking "Some holy angel (to) fly to the court of England....that a swift blessing may soon return to this our suffering country under a hand accursed!" Macbeth, obviously, is not a popular king! He has reigned for a short period of time, but his evil has already inflicted the land.

Notes
This scene shows into what disfavor Macbeth has quickly fallen with his nobles. It is significant to note that both Lennox and the lord no longer refer to Macbeth as king, but as "tyrant". They also describe the state of affairs as "suffering under a hand accursed." The Scottish citizens long for a less chaotic time where they can safely entertain guests, sleep peacefully, honor a true king, and live without the fear of bloody knives. Macduff, who has already been identified in the banquet scene as the new thorn in Macbeth's side, has gone to seek the help of the English King in order to reestablish order in Scotland. Macbeth has heard of Macduff's actions and called the noble to him. But Macduff has brazenly refused the
king. The audience can easily imagine what the news of Macduff is doing to Macbeth's paranoia. He is obviously pushed to the limit, for the unnamed lord reveals that "the tyrant" is preparing for war.

It is significant to note that as Macbeth is falling rapidly into individual chaos, he is inflicting that same chaos in the country. To show the parallels between the two, Shakespeare develops several scenes, such as this one, to inform the audience of the growing public revulsion to Macbeth. It is also important to note the speed at which this is all happening. Things are falling apart at an unbelievable pace. Fortunately, Lennox is aware of the time factor and prays for a "swift blessing" for Scotland. It will take divine intervention to return this evil chaos to normalcy!

**ACT IV, SCENE 1**

**Summary**

The fourth and final witch scene in the play is set in a cavern with a boiling cauldron in the middle. As in the other witch scenes, the weather is dark and ominous, with thunder in the background. The three witches are concocting their "hell-broth" and casting spells, obviously while waiting for Macbeth to arrive. As they throw entrails and other vile things into their magic potion and stir it, they chant their famous song: "Double, double, toil, and trouble, fire burn and cauldron bubble." During their preparations, Hecate, their queen, joins them and praises their efforts, saying, "Oh, well done! I commend your pains and everyone shall share in t' gains." She then instructs the witches to sing and dance around the cauldron. In the midst of their music, Macbeth enters and greets them as "secret, black and midnight hags." He then demands answers to his questions. The witches are eager to oblige and conjure up apparitions for Macbeth to satisfy his questioning. The first one appears with a clap of thunder and is nothing more than a head wearing armor. It calls Macbeth three times, warns him to "beware Macduff," and quickly disappears. Thunder also calls for the second apparition, a child covered with blood. Again the apparition calls Macduff three times and tells him to "be bloody, bold, and resolute: laugh to scorn the power of man; for none of woman born shall harm Macbeth." The king is delighted to hear this news, and his first reaction is to spare Macduff's life since he need not fear him. But he quickly changes his mind, deciding not to tempt fate. The thunder sounds again, and a third apparition appears as a crowned child carrying a tree in his hand. The child tells Macbeth to be brave and proud and not to worry about conspirators because "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him." This news overjoys Macbeth, for he believes such a feat is an impossibility.

Macbeth still wants to know the answer to one more question. "Shall Banquo's issue ever reign in this kingdom?" The witches suggest that the king does not want to hear the answer to that question, but Macbeth insists saying, "Deny me this, and an eternal curse fall on you." Suddenly the cauldron begins to sink, and a trumpet sounds. Then a procession of 8 kings appear, the last one carrying a mirror. Banquo's ghost is at the end of the parade. As each king passes before his eyes, Macbeth looks in horror and realizes its resemblance to Banquo. Macbeth is heart sick that the original prophecy will come true, and he curses the witches and all who trust them.

After the kingly apparitions have departed, the witches perform again with music and dance and then suddenly vanish. Macbeth curses the day and calls to Lennox, who has been waiting outside. Macbeth questions him to find out if he has seen the three weird sisters, but he has not. Lennox, however, has news for the king. Macduff has fled to England. Macbeth is infuriated by the news and seeks retaliation. He plans to take Macduff's castle by surprise and kill his wife and children. The chaos of the scene will, it appears, end in greater chaos, murder, and mayhem.
Notes
The four witch scenes serve to bind the play together through their repetitive nature. They also create a strong visual image of the dark, gloomy mood that is characteristic of the entire play. Of the supernatural scenes, this final one is the most dramatic with the strongest visual imagery. Like in the other witch scenes, there is again thunder in the background and darkness all around to set the mood. In addition, there is a cauldron bubbling with a "hell-broth," and the three witches chant and dance around the fire. The picture is one of eerie chaos, just as is found in Macbeth's mind and in the entire country of Scotland.

The language and structure of the scene reinforce the sense of swirling chaos. The witches stir their magic potion "round about the cauldron," and Hecate instructs her charge to "now about the cauldron sing, like elves and fairies in a ring." Macbeth then comes into the scene and, with a storm force, demands answers from the witches. He says he does not care what stormy destruction they cause, "though you untie the winds and let them fight against the churches...though trees blow down...though castles topple...though the treasure of Nature's germens (atoms) tumble all together, even till destruction sickens," Macbeth wants to know his future. The magical number three also swirls around the whole scene. There are three witches; "thrice the brinded cat hat mewed;" there are three verses to their singing, and the refrain of "Double, double toil and trouble" is repeated three times; there are three apparitions called forth, and they call to Macbeth, repeating his name three times; and finally three prophesies are given to the king (just as is his first meeting with the three weird sisters). The scene is also divided into three sections. In the first part, the witches are alone in the cavern stirring "poisoned entrails...eye of newt...gall of goat" and other horrible ingredients into the "hell-broth." The second section of the scene is when Macbeth approaches the witches and sees the apparitions. The third and final section is when the king talks to Lennox and reveals his mental state has declined even further, to the point that he plans to needlessly murder the wife and children of Macduff.

The appearance of the three apparitions adds to the sense of chaos in the scene. The first one, the armed head, seems almost timid, "unmanly." He speaks only briefly, warning Macbeth to "beware Macduff" and then begs to be dismissed, as if not able to stand the sight of the wicked king. The image of this first apparition is likely a mockery of Macbeth himself--small, armed for murder, and uncomfortable with himself. Since it is only an armed head, without other members of the body present, it foreshadows that Macbeth will have to fight Macduff alone, without supporters.

The second apparition is the disgusting image of a child covered in blood (a reflection back to the bloody daggers, bloody hands, and bloody face). This ghost has more to say, telling Macbeth to be "bloody, bold, and resolute...scorn the power of man." He then promises Macbeth that he will not be harmed by anyone born of woman. (Later in the play, the audience learns that Macduff had been "untimely ripped" from the womb.) The image of the bloody child is another mockery of Macbeth. He has spilled much blood to gain and protect the throne, and yet he knows he cannot possess it for long, for he is childless, with no heirs to wear the crown. The second apparition also foreshadows the murdering of Macduff's child by the vengeful Macbeth in the next scene.

The third apparition is the image of a crowned child carrying a tree in his hand. It speaks longer and more-assuredly that the first two apparitions and tells Macbeth to be "lion-mettled and proud," for "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him." The image of this regal child, in contrast to the bloody one before, is of new growth and life. The blood (symbols of murder, evil, and chaos) has been replaced with a tree (new life, regeneration, goodness). The apparition foreshadows that calm will again come to Scotland, not under the bloody rule of Macbeth, but under the new reign of Banquo's heirs.
It is significant to note Macbeth's reaction to each apparition. To the first one, the king gives thanks for the word of caution and praises the apparition for knowing how much he does fear Macduff. His reaction to the second one is to say "Then live, Macduff." He feels he should not worry about his enemy since the king assumes Macduff was born of woman. A moment later, the king's chaotic, fearful mind switches gear and decides that "Thou shalt not live" in order to be double sure and in order to be able to sleep again (as if one more murder would aid his sleeplessness). Macbeth, totally missing the meaning of the third apparition, reacts to it by saying it has uttered "sweet bodements." Macbeth is feeling invulnerable for he thinks that no one "can impress the forest, bid the tree unfix his earth-bound root."

Even though Macbeth has reacted to each of the three appearances (that do reflect realities in this case), he still is not satisfied (he always wants more). He wants to know if the earlier prophecy about Banquo will come true, if his heirs will seize the throne. To answer his question, the witches bring forth a parade of eight kings; all look like Banquo, with Banquo's ghost in the rear. The vision is ghastly to Macbeth, and he screams, "Horrible sight." His fear, that his murdering has been only for the benefit of Banquo' sons, seems to be true.

After the parade of kings, the witches have nothing more to show Macbeth and vanish into the dark night. Lennox then enters. Macbeth turns to him and curses the witches saying, "Infected be the air where on they ride." He also ironically curses himself by saying, "Damned (be) all those that trust them!" What an appropriate point in the play for Macbeth to utter these spoken words. Macbeth has truly damned himself throughout the play by his thoughts and actions and has become the most damnable of tyrants. But at the end of this scene, he is plotting his most evil act of the entire play -- the innocent murder of Macduff's wife and children. It is to be a murder without purpose or meaning, the evil action of a totally sick and chaotic mind.

ACT IV, SCENE 2

Summary
This scene takes place at Macduff's castle in Fife. Lady Macduff, with her young son at her side, is conversing with noble Ross about her husband's having fled the country. She is understandably upset, feels deserted, fears for his life, and thinks "his flight was madness." She openly calls him a traitor who acted out of fear. Ross tries to convince her that he acted from wisdom, not fear. Lady Macduff scoffs and says, "Wisdom! to leave his wife, to leave his babes...he loves us not." Ross assures her that her husband is noble and wise, and only the times are traitorous. Almost overcome with emotion, Ross leaves, and the mother turns her attention to her child, saying to him that she fears his father is dead. The son refuses to believe it, but he does ask if his father was a traitor. His mother answers that anyone who lies is a traitor and should be hanged by honest men. With a child's vision, her son answers that "there are liars enow to beat the honest men and hang them up." Lady Macduff laughs at his grown up thoughts, but the laughter is interrupted by an unknown messenger who has come to warn Lady Macduff that "some danger does approach you nearly." He advises her to take the children and flee from Fife. Then he is off. Lady Macduff is too melancholy and astonished to react. She asks herself, "Whither should I fly?...I have done no harm." In truth, there is not time for escape. The murderers enter and stab the young boy who calls out a warning. "He has killed me, mother; run away, I pray you." Lady Macduff, screaming "murder," runs out, pursued by the murderers who are certain to kill her as well.

Notes
In this scene, the audience is vividly shown the results of Macbeth's chaos on a personal, family level. Macduff, as a target of the king's fear, has wisely left the country and fled to England, leaving behind his wife and children. At the beginning of the scene, Shakespeare poignantly presents the emotions of the
wife he left behind. Lady Macduff does not understand her husband's desertion and calls him a traitor, driven by fear. She feels abandoned, unloved, and afraid. As a mother, she is worried about how she will provide for her children. Ross tries to ease her pain, saying Macduff was no traitor, but a wise and noble man. Then, in an almost poetic manner, he explains to Lady Macduff the horrors that reign in Scotland that caused her husband's actions. He says, "Cruel are the times, when we are traitors and do not know ourselves...we know not what we fear, but float upon a wild and violent sea." With these words, Ross has perfectly captured the spirit of the country driven into chaos by the madness of Macbeth. It also foreshadows the "violent sea" that is about to engulf the gentle lady.

When Ross departs, she turns her attention to her son that is by her side. She tries to prepare him for the fact that his father may be dead. The young boy refuses to accept that fact or that his father was a traitor; instead, the lad tries to cheer up his mother by joking with her. It is a loving, family scene that makes the horror that is about to occur even more vile. As they talk, they are interrupted by a messenger who warns Lady Macduff that she and her children are in danger and should flee. Although unnamed, the messenger is obviously a good-hearted soul who has taken a great risk to bring the warning. The melancholy Lady Macduff, unfortunately, is unprepared to deal with the news; she has no where to go, no one to lean on. She accepts her fate, realizing the irony of the times "where to do harm is laudable, to do good sometimes accounted dangerous folly." It appears that evil will prevail over good once more. Her thoughts are interrupted by the intrusion of the murderer. When the young son boldly calls the intruder a "shag-haired villain," he is stabbed on stage. Before he dies, he screams to his mother to "run away, I beg you," a clear flashback to an earlier murder scene where Banquo calls a warning to his son Fleance to flee. The scene ends with Lady Macduff running off to meet her ill fate.

This scene probably shows the greatest horror in the entire play, for it reveals total disorder and murder for no purpose. The fact that the victims are a gentle woman and her young son intensifies the depth of the horror. It is Macbeth (evil) gone totally astray. And yet there are pinpoints of goodness and hope in the scene. Ross (a picture of goodness) serves as a comforter to the lady in the midst of the chaos. An unknown messenger (symbolic of the good, unnamed, unseen people of Scotland) risks his life to try and save Lady Macduff. The young son (symbolic of the future) refuses to accept the evil of the times (his father's possible treachery or death) and dies in bravery trying to protect his mother from the evil. There is still hope beyond Macbeth and his chaos!

ACT IV, SCENE 3

Summary
This scene opens in front of the king's castle in England with Malcolm and Macduff discussing the state of affairs brought about by Macbeth in Scotland. It is not a pretty picture, for each day "new sorrows strike heaven on the face." Malcolm wants to find a desolate place and weep for his homeland. Macduff wants to take up arms against Macbeth. At the beginning of their conversation, it is obvious that the two men are distrustful of one another. Macduff senses the worry of the prince and assures him, "I am not treacherous." Malcolm is still not convinced. He questions why Macduff left his wife and child in peril in order to come to England. The prince admits that he is suspicious and concerned for his own safety. Macduff, in frustration, cries out, "Bleed, bleed, poor country." He feels there is no hope for Scotland if he cannot join forces with Malcolm against Macbeth. But since he is not trusted, Macduff feels he has to leave.

Malcolm stops Macduff in order to test his trustworthiness. The prince pretends to be an evil person filled with vices, and if compared to Macbeth, Malcolm says, "Black Macbeth will seem pure as snow." Macduff scoffs and says, "not in the legions of horrid hell can come a devil more damned in evils to top

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Macbeth. Malcolm agrees that the present king is "bloody, avaricious, deceitful, malicious, smacking of every sin that has a name," but he promises that he is worse, more lustful and greedy. Macduff still does not give up on Malcolm, but suggests ways for him to handle his vices. Macduff further believes that surely Malcolm possesses virtues to outweigh the vices. Malcolm, however, claims he has none of the royal graces of "justice, verity, temperance, stableness, perseverance, mercy, devotion, patience, or courage." He further says that if he were king, he would "pour the sweet milk of concord into hell, uproot the universal peace, confound all unity on earth." Macduff, at this news, again bemoans his beloved Scotland. Then he, being taken in by Malcolm's pretense, turns on the prince and says he is not fit to govern Scotland or even to live. He gives up on the fight for his homeland and bids farewell to Malcolm a second time.

Once again Malcolm stops Macduff. He praises Macduff's integrity of soul and noble passion for Scotland. He then admits to the trickery he has used to test Macduff's purpose. Malcolm then pledges support and loyalty to Macduff in his attempt to overthrow Macbeth and says, "I put myself to thy direction." He tells Macduff that Siward and 10,000 English soldiers are at their command to aid in the fight. Macduff is struck dumb by this news, confused between the appearance and the reality. When Malcolm questions him about it, Macduff explains his confusion: "Such welcome and unwelcome things at once, 'tis hard to reconcile."

A doctor then passes by to say that King Edward is coming. The physician stays only long enough to describe King Edward's power of healing. Malcolm also tells Macduff that this holy king (in total contrast to the devilish Macbeth) also has a divine gift of prophecy (in contrast to the evil prophesying of the witches). Then Ross enters the scene, freshly arrived from Scotland, and again Malcolm becomes suspicious. Macduff inquires about the state of affairs in Scotland. Ross explains that nothing has changed, "It's like a grave." When Malcolm asks what the latest grief is, Ross responds, "Each minute teems a new one." When Macduff quizzes him about his wife, Ross at first avoids the news of her murder. But when he hears that Malcolm and Macduff are about to lead an attack on Macbeth, he tells about the king's latest brutality, the "savage slaughter" of Macduff's family. Macduff is overcome with grief at his loss and guilt for his absence. Malcolm encourages him to turn the grief into a fighting spirit against Macbeth, "Be this the whetstone of your sword." Macduff agrees he must get revenge!

Notes
This scene is different from others in the play in two ways: it is the only scene not set in Scotland, and it has mostly talk and little action. It takes place in England at the king's palace and opens with Macduff and Malcolm bemoaning the bloody state of their homeland. Macduff gets right to the point. He paints a vivid image of the sickness raging in Scotland. He is tired of the "widows' howls" and "orphans' cries," (an ironic image in light of his family's recent murder of which he has no knowledge). He seeks Malcolm's help to strike out against Macbeth. Malcolm, however, is suspicious of everyone (and has a right to be after his father's execution) and thinks that "all things foul would wear the brows of grace," (appear to be what they are not). Before he joins forces, he must test Macduff's loyalty. The prince claims to be a vile and evil person, worse than Macbeth (the theme of appearance vs. reality once again). Macduff believes his confession and weeps for Scotland (much as he will soon weep for his family), for he had hoped that Malcolm, the rightful future king, would save his country from total ruin.

But things are not as they seem throughout this scene. Malcolm is really not the vile person he has described himself to be. Instead, the reality, as he later tells Macduff, is that he "at no time broke my faith, would not betray the devil to his fellow, and delights no less in truth than life." Macduff is certainly relieved to learn the truth. Reality (goodness in place of evil) is beginning to prevail. Ross, the noble messenger in the scene, also advances the theme of appearance vs. reality. When Macduff quizzes him
about the welfare of his family, Ross replies, "They were well at peace when I did leave 'em," which leaves the appearance that they are still well. Ross and the audience know the truth behind this appearance, and when Macduff discovers the reality of his murdered family, he is devastated by his guilt and tortured by his guilt for having left them in Scotland. This time it is Malcolm who must persuade Macduff to leave his grief and take up arms against Macbeth in revenge of this family's murder. Ironically, at the beginning of the scene, it was Macduff encouraging Malcolm to put away his grief over his father and revenge his death by attacking Macbeth.

There is another strong irony in this scene. Scotland, the homeland and country that they love, is described in the most vile terms:

> Alas, poor country,
> Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot
> Be called our mother, but our grave....
> Where sighs and groans and shrieks that rend the air,
> Are made, not marked; where violent sorrow seems
> A modern ecstasy."

In ironic contrast, England, the foreign land that should be feared, is described as a heavenly place with a holy king. Fortunately for Malcolm and for Scotland, because of the prince's virtues and basic goodness, King Edward will lend his "healing" touch to Scotland, ironically in the form of Siward and 10,000 murderous soldiers. How sad that it will take greater death and mayhem to destroy the chaos that has become Scotland in the person of Macbeth. The scene ends in positive foreshadowing with a picture of Malcolm on the throne and reigning in the manner of his family before him, his father being a "sainted king" with a queen that was often on her knees in prayer (an image that is in total contrast to Macbeth and his queen). The hope is that goodness (Malcolm) will prevail over evil (Macbeth).

**ACT V, SCENE 1**

**Summary**

This scene takes place in the castle at Dunsinane with an unnamed lady-in-waiting conversing with a physician about Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking. The doctor has observed the queen for two days and not seen any incidents like the gentlewoman has described, and he is beginning to doubt her truthfulness. He questions her about what things Lady Macbeth has said while sleepwalking, but the gentlewoman refuses to answer, for she feels no one would believe her. Lady Macbeth then enters the scene in a tranced state, unable to see the others even though her eyes are open. She pauses and rubs her hands, as if washing them. When she can't get them clean, she screams, "Out, damned spot" (of blood). She then begins to talk, as if speaking to Macbeth, and incriminates both of them in the process. "Fie, my lord...What need we fear who know it, when none can call our power to accompt (account)? Yet who would have thought the old man (Duncan) to have so much blood in him?" She continues by revealing Macbeth's part in the deaths of Banquo and Macduff's family. But her thoughts are constantly interrupted by the image of the blood on her hands, and she asks, "Will these hands ne'er be clean?....all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." The doctor then tells the lady-in-waiting that "This disease is beyond my practice," and says that Lady Macbeth needs a priest more than she needs a physician. Before he departs, he begs to the heavens, "God forgive us all!"

**Notes**

This scene serves several purposes. First, it is a flashback to all the evil in the play, as remembered by the tranced Lady Macbeth: the execution of Duncan, the murder of Banquo, the slaughter of Macduff's wife
and children, and the belief on the part of the king and queen that they were too powerful to be touched. The evil has driven her to insanity, and when she looks at her hands, she sees blood upon them. She tries over and over to clean the evidence from her person, but the blood always remains, just as her guilt remains. Her hands (synonymous with her heart and soul) will never be clean again. Ironically, this is the same lady who told Macbeth after Duncan's murder that "A little water clears us of this deed: how easy is it then!" She has found out the hard way that guilt is never easy, but a powerful force that destroys both her and her husband.

The scene also serves to reinforce two of the play's central themes. Lady Macbeth appears to be awake with her eyes wide open, but the appearance lies. (Remember Duncan stating that it is always hard to recognize a traitor in his face, to distinguish appearance from reality.) In truth, Lady Macbeth is in a tranced state, but reveals the reality of her soul. To develop the appearance theme further, Lady Macbeth imagines that she sees blood upon her hands (an appearance) and tries to wash it away (as if that could cleanse her soul). The audience sees nothing on her hands (reality), but sees inside to the soul covered with blood. The scene also develops the theme that evil begets evil, but will be punished. Lady Macbeth's past (evil) has driven her to madness (evil), which is truly a living death and a punishment for the actual deaths she has caused.

The scene is also filled with irony. In the past, Lady Macbeth has begged for the darkness of night to hide her evil deeds. Now she cannot stand the darkness and keeps a candle always by her side, almost as if trying to disperse the darkness of her soul. It is also ironic that Lady Macbeth is able to sleep (unlike her husband who is driven to madness by his sleeplessness), but her sleep, interrupted by sleepwalking and fits of guilt, does not bring relief, but greater pain. (Remember at the end of the banquet scene in Act III, Lady Macbeth tells her husband that all that is wrong with him is that he needs to get some sleep.) It is also ironic that Lady Macbeth's guilt has driven her mad, but in her madness she is much more likable than when she was the cold, calculating, greedy mind behind Duncan's murder. Lady Macbeth was untouchable before, but is even more untouchable now, as evidenced by the doctor saying he cannot help her. Only a priest (a symbol of goodness, forgiveness, and God) can help her now.

ACT V, SCENE 2

Summary
This brief scene takes place in the open country near Dunsinane and is a picture of impending battle. Drums are beating, flags are flying, and the Scottish soldiers have gathered to prepare for their attack against Macbeth. The English army, led by Malcolm, Macduff, and Siward is nearby. Angus, one of the Scottish lords, says, "Near Birnam Wood shall we meet them," recalling the last prophecy of the three witches. From the conversation amongst the gentlemen in this scene, the audience learns that Donaldbain has not yet jointed his brother Malcolm. The lords also discuss Macbeth. Although the king has fortified his castle, he has no real supporters. Everyone knows he has lost self-control, and most think he has gone mad. Talk then turns to the battle and purging Scotland of its sickness. They are all eager to fight, "to give obedience where 'tis truly owed." As the scene closes, they are off to Birnam Wood for the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Notes
This very short scene is tightly written to accomplish several purposes. It gives information about the attitude of the Scottish toward the battle, reveals Macbeth's current state of mind and isolation, shows the proximity of the English army (suggesting the battle will soon begin), pinpoints Birnam Wood as the place where the Scottish and English soldiers will join and reveals how the witches' final prophecy for Macbeth
will come to pass. Despite its brevity, the scene is filled with irony. Macbeth, who has been so concerned throughout the play with his manliness, is soon to be defeated by English soldiers who are "unrough youths, that even now protest their first of manhood." It is also ironic that Angus says of Macbeth, "Now he does feel his secret murders sticking on his hands." (Remember that Macbeth, immediately after Duncan's murder, knew the whole of the ocean could not wash his blood off his hands, and in the last scene Lady Macbeth has realized her hands will also never come clean.) Angus' words are again ironic when he says Macbeth's title (the only part of being a king that he ever had) now "hangs loose about him, like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief." Macbeth was a thief (he stole lives from people and peace from his country) who become dwarfish (small) when he stole the giant's robe (Duncan's crown). It is also ironic that Malcolm is referred to by these gentlemen as the healer of Scotland, when, in fact, Malcolm feels he has been healed by the holy King Edward. But in this healing image, hope for Scotland is foreshadowed.

ACT V, SCENE 3

Summary
This scene opens with Macbeth trying to calm his fears about the approaching army by remembering the prophecies of the witches. He tells himself, "Till Birnam Wood to Dunsinane I cannot taint with fear." Then he reminds himself that Macduff was surely born of woman. Finally he lies to himself one more time: "The mind I sway by and the heart I bear shall never say with doubt nor shake with fear." A fearful servant interrupts his thoughts and tells the king that 10,000 English soldiers are marching towards Dunsinane. Macbeth wants to hear none of it, and sends the servant away. Then a dejected Macbeth goes back to his reflections and says, "I have lived long enough," for he knows that old age will not bring him honor, love, or friendship. But he is determined to "fight, till from my bones my flesh be hacked." As he dons his armor, the king turns to the doctor and asks about his wife. The physician reports that she is not really sick, but "troubled with thick-coming fancies."

Macbeth begs the doctor to cure her from the same things he so desperately wants freedom from:

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,  
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,  
Raze out the written troubles of the brain.....  
Cleanse the stuffed bosom of that perilous stuff  
Which weighs upon the heart?

In his response to these words of Macbeth, the doctor captures the entire meaning of the play when he answers, "The patient must minister to himself."

As the scene (and the English army) advances, Macbeth's state of mind deteriorates, as evidenced by the fact that he cannot hold to a single sentence, but interrupts himself over and over. He talks to Seton, his only remaining officer, then to the doctor, then to Seton again, never completing a whole thought. In one brief word to the doctor, Macbeth does reveal his understanding of the state of affairs in Scotland and almost prayerfully and uncharacteristically asks the doctor to "cast the water of my land, find her disease, and purge it to a sound and pristine health." Macbeth knows he cannot "minister to himself," (as evidenced by his death wish spoken during the scene), but he wants normalcy for his country. Perhaps there is still some shred of goodness in Macbeth. The scene closes with Macbeth pathetically going out in his armor, "trying to act like a man," and still saying, "I will not be afraid of death....’til Birnam forest come to Dunsinane."
Notes

The scene captures the full chaos that rages in the mind of Macbeth. One moment he is pensive and melancholy; the next moment he is ranting and raving. One moment he is worrying about his wife's health and the sickness of Scotland; the next moment he is ordering Seton to hang all traitors. There is little rational in the pattern of his speech, just as there is little rational in his state of mind. The picture of Macbeth in this scene is intentionally pathetic. As his only officer helps him into his armor, the audience is reminded of the image of him painted in the last scene as a dwarf in giant's clothing. The armor no longer fits the image; Macbeth is no longer the heroic warrior pictured in the beginning of the play.

With 10,000 soldiers fast approaching, Macbeth still refuses to face the reality truthfully, but hangs on to the witches' prophesies that were filled with double meaning. The king does not fear Malcolm, for he believes he was born of woman, and he refuses to believe that Birnam Wood will ever come to Dunsinane. As always Macbeth confuses the appearance and the reality. Furthermore, the king is obviously quaking in fear, yet swears he will never "sag with doubt, nor shake with fear," pathetically humorous words from an "unmanly" king who has to belittle his servant to make himself appear more important and who has doubted and feared his way into total chaos that causes his ruin.

ACT V, SCENE 4

Summary
This brief scene takes place in the country near Birnam Wood where the Scottish rebels have joined forces with Malcolm, Macduff, and the English soldiers. Malcolm enters and encourages those around him by saying, "I hope the days are near at hand that chambers will be safe" to sleep in again. He also tells them that many have deserted Macbeth, and only "constrained things whose hearts are absent" serve him. Finally he advises the soldiers to cut boughs off the trees to use as camouflage in their approach to Dunsinane. Then they are off to war.

Notes
The main purpose of this short scene is to show how the witches' prophecy will come to pass. "Macbeth will not be vanquished til Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane." The audience now sees how that will happen as the soldiers wear branches from Birnam as camouflage. Symbolically, the image is a foreshadowing that a natural order (peace and goodness as personified in Malcolm) will return to Dunsinane. The scene is also a sharp contrast to the previous scene with the chaotic Macbeth, fearful and out of control. These soldiers, under the calm encouragement of Malcolm, are eager, orderly, and prepared. If these soldiers can conquer the evil Macbeth, as predicted, there is hope that goodness will prevail and a healed Scotland will result.

ACT V, SCENE 5

This scene again take place in the court of the palace at Dunsinane with Macbeth talking to Seton and his soldiers. He is still lying to himself as the tells the others, "Our castle's strength will laugh a siege to scorn." His vain words are interrupted by the wailing of women. Macbeth admits he is unaffected by the sounds since he is so used to "slaughterhouse thoughts." He does, however, ask Seton why they are crying. The officer replies that the queen is dead. Macbeth responds with words that reflect not grief, but the total emptiness of life that he feels:

    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.

A messenger interrupts the king's thoughts and tells him that as he stood watch on the hill, "I looked toward Birnam, and anon, me thought the wood began to move." Macbeth immediately thinks of the prophecy and curses "the fiend (devil) that lies like truth." He knows that if the woods are moving towards his castle, his days are numbered. He ends the scene by again stating a death wish: "I 'gin to be aweary of the sun, and wish th'estate i' the' world were undone." He says, however, he will die in armor like a man.

Notes
This scene clearly shows two sides of Macbeth, the appearance and the reality. In the beginning, the king is still puffed up and deceiving himself into believing his castle's strength will hold against 10,000 soldiers. His mood changes from mock courage to melancholy at the sound of the wailing of the women. (Think how many women he has caused to wail over murdered husbands and sons.) He ponders how he used to be filled with life and emotion. Now he is not even bothered by women crying because he has "supped full of horror: direness...cannot once start (startle) me," ironic words spoken just before he learns that his wife is dead. His mood deepens into emptiness when he learns about Lady Macbeth. His famous speech, elicited by her passing, is filled with irony. He says that life drags on "creeps in this petty pace" when, in reality, the speed of his actions and the development of the play's plot has been at a breath-taking speed. He describes life as a brief candle (therefore, death must be eternal darkness); it is ironic that through the whole play, Macbeth has begged for darkness or night to hide his evil. (Perhaps subconsciously, he has longed for the sweet release of death all along as a release from his worldly pain and guilt.) The king then calls life "a poor player that struts...upon the stage...a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing." Although Macbeth is speaking of life in general, he ironically is really painting a self-portrait with his words. He is a poor player (filled with appearance rather than truth); he has strutted through life (falsely proud of stolen power); he has told a tale (his whole existence in the play has been a tale, a lie marred by appearance rather than reality); he is an idiot (a foolish man that goes mad); he is fully of sound and fury (chaos characterized his life); life is signifying nothing (his life is to end in total meaninglessness). What a pathetic commentary on living!

ACT V, SCENE 6

Summary
This very brief scene takes place just beyond the castle gate of Dunsinane. Malcolm, Siward, and Macduff converse as they lead their army forward. Malcolm instructs his troops to throw down the branches from Birnam Wood, for they no longer need camouflage. Then Malcolm, obviously in control and command, orders Siward and his son to lead the first charge. He and Macduff will follow. Siward sets off, indicating he is well prepared for the fight. Macduff is eager as well and tells the troops to sound the trumpets as "harbingers of blood and death."

Notes
This scene, the shortest one in the play, serves two purposes. First it gives the location of the army. The
soldiers are right outside of Dunsinane, and the fighting will start soon. Secondly, it places Malcolm into the leadership role that he rightfully deserves. He calmly give orders and organizes the attack, a very different image that the one painted of the chaotic and demented Macbeth bemoaning his life. It is significant to note that the army has come under the camouflage of branches, appearing to be something they were not; but it is now time to lay the branches aside and appear as they really are. Symbolically, the scene indicates that it is time to rid Scotland of Macbeth, a shallow appearance of a king, and replace him with Malcolm, the real prince who possesses the lineage and royal graces to honor the throne. Although the blood and death of fighting is eminent at the end of the scene, the promise is that evil and chaos will be vanquished, and peace and order will be restored to Scotland.

ACT V, SCENE 7

Summary
This fast-paced scene is filled with military action and the sounds of war. Macbeth enters the battlefield and wonders aloud what kind of man would not be born of woman. Young Siward enters and asks his name. When the king replies, the young soldier says, "The devil himself could not pronounce a title more hateful to mine ear." Siward then challenges Macbeth to a duel and is killed in the fighting. Macbeth has a small victory. Macduff then enters and is looking for the king, for he wants personal revenge for his family. He calls out to Macbeth and says, "If thou be'est slain and with no stroke of mine, my wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still." As Macduff continues his search, Malcolm and Siward enter. Siward gives an update on the battle. The castle has surrendered without a struggle, and many of Macbeth's men have deserted him. It appears the battle is almost over.

As they depart towards the castle, Macbeth returns to the scene. He admits he has contemplated falling on his own sword to end his chaos, but has decided to continue the fight. Macduff spies his enemy and calls to him. Macbeth answers by saying, "Get thee back, my soul is too much charged with blood of thine already." The king is still troubled by the old murders. Macduff ignores Macbeth's words, advances, and challenges the king to fight. Still confident that he is protected by the witches' prophecy, Macbeth tells Macduff that he is invulnerable. He explains, "I bear a charmed life, which must not yield to one of woman born." Macduff breaks the charm by telling him, "Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripped." Hearing these words, Macbeth realizes that this is the man who will murder him, and he curses the trickery of the witches: "Be these juggling fiends no more believed that palter with us in a double sense." At first Macbeth says that he does not want to fight Macduff; but the alternative is worse to him. He will not surrender "to kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet." There is still an ounce of pride in the king. Macbeth raises his shield, and they go off fighting.

Malcolm, Siward, and Ross enter the scene while conversing. Malcolm is concerned about their friends who are missing in action. Siward, the veteran soldier, reminds him that there will be deaths in any battle, but fortunately for them, their losses seem small. Then Malcolm specifically mentions that Macduff and young Siward are missing. Ross, again acting as a messenger, delivers the bad news that Siward's son "has paid a soldier's debt...and like a man he died." His father can release him peacefully to God knowing that he died fighting like a true soldier. Macduff then enters the scene carrying Macbeth's head on a pole. Knowing that the tyrant king is dead, Macduff salutes Malcolm and says, "Hail, King! for so thou art." The noble thanes join in the greeting as the trumpets sound in the background. Malcolm addresses the crowd and immediately takes steps to return sanity to his country and destroy the fear and chaos. He tells the thanes that they will become earls and that they should call home their exiled friends. They should also seek out the last supporters of "the dead butcher (Macbeth) and his fiend-like queen." The chaos of Macbeth has passed, and the promise is for peace in Scotland once again.
OVERALL ANALYSES

The Protagonist, Macbeth

Macbeth is a classic tragic figure brought to ruin by his own greed, guilt, and fear. Shakespeare intensifies Macbeth's tragic nature by showing him to be a valiant hero in the beginning of the play. He is a courageous warrior and one of King Duncan's best generals. In the second scene of the play, Macbeth has just won his most important battle and saved Scotland from the Norwegian King. To honor his bravery, King Duncan gives Macbeth the title of Thane of Cawdor. This is one of the first steps to Macbeth's undoing, for he longs to be more than just a thane. His innate greed is first inflamed by three wicked witches who prophesy to Macbeth that he will become Thane of Cawdor and then King of Scotland. When the first prophecy comes to pass, Macbeth immediately begins to long for greater power. He realizes that in order to seize the throne from the king, he will have to murder him. Being a basically kind man, he is horrified at his own thoughts and decides murder is beyond his capability. He decides to let fate take its course, and if he is meant to be king, it will happen. But the seed of greed has been planted, and Macbeth is a rash man.

In the fifth scene of the play, another side of the early Macbeth is developed. He is shown to be a loving husband who values his wife and calls her "his dearest partner in greatness," sharing what he is with her. They are obviously close, for he immediately writes a letter to Lady Macbeth and tells her about the prophecies of the three witches, for he wants to please her and give information about "what greatness is promised thee." It is Lady Macbeth who further inflames Macbeth's greed that was planted by the three evil witches. As soon as she reads Macbeth's letter, she decides King Duncan must be killed so her husband can become king and she can become queen. There is no hesitation or indecision about her lust for power. Her only fear is that Macbeth is "too full of the milk of human kindness" to plan a murder. Therefore, she will take matters into her own hands and manipulate her husband into acquiescence. She tells Macbeth that immediate action should be taken, for "the future is in the instant." She carefully lays the plans for her husband to murder Duncan on the very same night, as the king sleeps in their castle. Trusting the ability and judgment of his wife, Macbeth consents with some reluctance.

Macbeth struggles with his agreement to murder Duncan, for Macbeth sees the good in people, and Duncan is a worthy and humble king; Duncan is also a kinsman and a guest in his castle. Macbeth, who can be truthful with himself early in the play, acknowledges that it is only "vaulting ambition" that makes him consider the vile deed. As his wife suspected, he is really too kind by nature to carry through with murderous plans. He tells Lady Macbeth, "We will proceed no further in this business." She will not listen to her husband, but strikes out at his strong sense of vanity and pride in his manliness and calls him a fearful coward, in sharp contrast to the brave warrior he believes himself to be. Then a new trait of Macbeth, that haunts him through the rest of the play, is depicted. He is truly a fearful man: not afraid of murdering (he has murdered many on the battlefield), but afraid of being caught. The manipulative Lady Macbeth, who is more self-confident than her husband, believes they will not fail and convinces Macbeth that the plan must be completed. Macbeth is obviously not as strong-willed as his wife.

Before the murder ever takes place, Shakespeare further develops the depth of Macbeth's fear, which is the man trait that leads to his self-inflicted downfall. As the time of the execution draws near, Macbeth's fears give way to imaginative hallucination. He believes he sees a dagger hanging in front of his face; but when he reaches for it, he cannot grab it, and it taunts him further by dripping blood. It is the first of many incidents when Macbeth's fears fan the flames of his imagination. It will happen again when he hears voices calling to him to "Sleep no more" and when he sees Banquo's ghost sitting in his chair at the royal
After the murder is committed, Macbeth's fear grows greatly and is compounded by deep feelings of guilt. When Lady Macbeth tells him to return the bloody daggers to the king's chambers, the troubled Macbeth says, "I am afraid to think what I have done; Look on it again, I dare not." The irony is that Macbeth's conscience will make him look at the murder over and over again with no escape. Macbeth senses the depth of guilt immediately. When he looks at his bloody hands, he realizes that all of the water in the ocean will not be able to cleanse the blood from them or from his heart. His wife, who believes that "A little water clears us of the deed," mocks his fear and tells him she would be ashamed to have a heart as white as his. Lady Macbeth, who knows her husband better than anyone else in the play does, realizes that her husband, basically kind in heart, will struggle with his conscience to the point of his undoing. She warns him not to be "lost so poorly in your thoughts." Macbeth can only reply, "Twere best to not know myself." His self-hatred has begun. Lady Macbeth also reveals another of Macbeth's traits; he is often not good at appearances or putting on a "false face." She warns him, as they make their plans to murder Duncan, that he must "look like the innocent flower." She also warns him to appear bright and jovial to the guests at the royal banquet. She is fearful that his face cannot lie. And her fears are well founded, for at the banquet, Macbeth's true soul cries out and incriminates him clearly.

Ironically, Macbeth cannot enjoy wearing the crown that he has stolen because of mounting fear of discovery, and he fears his friend Banquo the most. Because Banquo is a good, honorable person who has vowed to "fight treasonous malice" and because he knows Macbeth so well, the king is certain that Banquo suspects the truth about him and will seek to right the wrong. Macbeth is also jealous of his friend because the witches have prophesied that Banquo's heirs will become kings of Scotland. Macbeth, therefore, feels he has no choice but to murder Banquo and his son Fleance in order to protect himself and his stolen crown. He alone plans the second murder without consulting or telling his wife, and he has no indecision about this murder, as he did with the first. Macbeth only knows he must act quickly in order to control his power, his future, and his posterity. His has become a true tyrant!

By the time of the royal banquet scene, found at mid-point in the play, Macbeth's fear and guilt have driven him to irrationality, chaos, and loss of self-control. During the meal, he sees the ghost of Banquo sitting in his chair and openly incriminates himself to all his guests by denying his guilt and saying, "Thou canst say I did it." His wife, who was always fearful about his being able to wear the false face, calls the ghost a "painting of you fear" and accuses her husband of being "quite unmanned in folly." This time the attacks against his manhood do nothing to calm him down or change his mind. Instead, he challenges the ghost to battle, as if he were still a noble warrior. But there is none of the old Macbeth in him. He is now so bathed in blood that he fears everyone around him and places paid spies in the houses of all his nobles. True paranoia has set in. He also transfers his old fear of Banquo to Macduff and acknowledges he must spill more blood to wash away his fright. In rashness and without thought of consequence, he has the family of Macduff murdered in revenge for the husband's flight fled to England and refusal to return at the king's summons. It is also rashness that leads him again to the three witches in order know his future, no matter what it holds.

Macbeth pathetically holds on to the false hope offered in the witches' prophecies until the very end. Since these is nothing left inside to encourage him, he seeks false encouragement and tries to believe he will not be murdered by a man or vanquished by an army. With false bravado, he dons his armor, prepared for battle and certain that his castle will hold until victory is won. But the armor does not seem to fit him correctly anymore; he appears to be a dwarf in giant's clothing and only a "dark shadow" of the brave general once honored by the king. He realizes that his chaotic existence has brought about his undoing and
that his life has no meaning, "a tale told by an idiot, fully of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Still attempting to appear manly, he goes out to meet his end, brought on by the vengeful Macduff, who carries the tyrant's head on a pole for all to see.

Macbeth was truly a tragic character. He had much to look forward to as Thane of Cawdor, but he wanted more. His greed led him to murder and theft, which causes guilt and fear. The fear leads to chaos, which causes his downfall.

**PLOT**

In writing Macbeth, Shakespeare created an almost perfect plot line with a short introduction, rapid rising action, a climax that occurs half way through the play, followed by rapid and intense falling action and a brief conclusion. The first two scenes of the play serve as an introduction. The opening witch scene sets the dark, somber mood of the entire play and foreshadows the "foulness" that is to come. The second scene introduces the character of Macbeth through conversation. He is depicted as a brave, intelligent, and noble warrior, who has just been honored by good King Duncan with a new title. In scene 3, the action of the play actually begins and moves forward at breath-taking speed throughout the balance of the play.

Macbeth comes into Scene 3 and meets with the evil witches, who plant the seed of greed in his not so noble mind. When they prophesy that Macbeth will become the King of Scotland, he immediately thinks of murdering the king. The audience is then kept on edge during the next few scenes and wonder if Macbeth is evil enough to carry through with seizing the crown through murder. By the opening of Act II, Macbeth is already wrestling with his conscience even though the evil deed is not done. He sees bloody daggers in front of this face and has to steel himself to commit the murder. The second scene in Act II reveals the aftermath of the execution and Macbeth bemoaning the blood on his hands which can never be cleansed. The rest of Act II show the effects of Duncan's murder on his kin and nobles and, more importantly, on Macbeth.

Act II opens with a scene of comic relief, the only one in the play. Its purpose is to slow the frantic, chaotic pace of the play for a brief interlude, to relax the audience after the tension of the murder and its aftermath, and to allow the audience to catch its breath before the next rush of action. Early in the act, Macbeth's deteriorating mind is clearly developed. He plans the murder of Banquo in Scene 2 and has it accomplished in Scene 3. By Scene 4, Macbeth has become irrational in response to his fear of discovery and guilt. At the royal banquet, he sees the ghost of Banquo sitting in his chair, and it is his undoing. He clearly incriminates himself by saying, "Thou canst say I did it." These words are the moment of climax or turning point in the play. Macbeth has offered his guilt for all the lords and ladies to see. Now it is simply a question of when and how he will meet his tragic end.

Macbeth spends the rest of the play pathetically fighting his fear and guilt and trying to protect his stolen crown. The falling action that follows the banquet scene continues at the same breath-taking speed of the rising action. Macbeth consults the evil witches again to learn his future and is warned against Macduff. Macduff, however, flees to England in Act IV and joins Malcolm in preparing an attack on the "mad tyrant." In retaliation for this light and refusal to return, Macbeth murders the family of Macduff. Macduff also loses his only family when Lady Macbeth kills herself in Act V.

In response to his wife's death, Macbeth cries out about the emptiness of life, but promises to fight until the end, which is near at hand. Malcolm and Macduff attack and easily overtake the king's castle. Then in the final scene of the play, Macduff fights Macbeth. The short conclusion of the play occurs when Macduff carries Macbeth's head in on a pole and hails Malcolm as the new King of Scotland. The well constructed play ends with the promise that order will return to Scotland under the rule of the new king.
QUESTIONS

1. At the beginning of the play, explain what Macbeth is like as a character.
2. Explain where the witches appear in the play and why they are important.
3. Why does Malcolm flee to Scotland?
4. Who is more eager to kill Duncan--Lady Macbeth or her husband? Explain why.
5. The banquet scene is extremely important to the plot of the play. Explain why.
6. Macbeth's fatal flaw is greed. Explain how it is his undoing.
7. What is Lady Macbeth's personality? How does she contribute to her husband's downfall?
8. How is the theme of appearance vs. reality developed in the play?
9. Contrast the characters of Macbeth with Banquo.
10. Macbeth hears a prophesy that he will be safe until "Birnam Wood" comes to Dunsinane. How does this prophesy affect Macbeth? Explain how the prophesy comes true.
11. Why does Macbeth have Lady Macduff and her children murdered? What does this reveal about Macbeth?
12. Ross serves as a messenger in the play. Explain the messages that he delivers.
13. What happens to Lady Macbeth at the end of the play?
14. Which character is not "born of woman"? Why is this information important to the play?
15. List at least three of the symbols that Shakespeare has used in writing the play and why they are important.

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