

## MACBETH Act I

### Scene 1

#### Purpose of the witches

- A supernatural element entering the story. (Shakespeare introduced the witches to flatter James I, who was an expert in witchcraft, and because they are in Holinshed's 'Chronicles').
- The witches not only embody inward temptation, but they are personifications of evil forces at work in the world, the active principle of evil in nature and society.
- The witches introduce an atmosphere of guilt and evil, which hovers over the whole play. These creatures of bad omen foreshadow the struggle between the forces of evil and the powers of good, and Macbeth is to be involved in this conflict.
- Relation with Satan, the principle of evil (also cf. cat).  
Satan has targeted Macbeth as a victim because he intends to overthrow the harmony, first of one person, then of the state, and finally of the whole universe.

#### Symbolic importance of the weather

- It harmonizes with the events in the story: effect of broadening out the atmosphere as if the whole universe were affected.
- The turmoil in nature echoes the strife in:
  - 1) Duncan's divided kingdom (rebellion and invasion)
  - 2) Macbeth's castle (where the king will be murdered)
  - 3) Macbeth's mind.

#### Purpose of scene I

- It creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and foreboding (mystery, superstition, evil).
- It tells us about what is going on (the battle in progress) and prepares the audience for Macbeth's arrival on stage.
- It states the great themes of the play:
  - a) the human struggle against the forces of evil
  - b) the confusion of values ( the morally good (fair) and the morally evil (foul) are mixed) (cf.: Fair is foul and foul is fair)
  - c) the theme of ambiguity (cf. question mark in the first two lines and: 'When the battle's lost and won'.

### Scene 2

- Scene II states the rebellious condition in Scotland. Macdonwald and the Thane of Cawdor have started this 'unnatural' revolt against the lawfully invested King of Scotland to usurp the power, thus destroying the harmonious course of nature. Both are helped in their treacherous plans by Sweno, the King of Norway. Shakespeare further underlines the unnaturalness of the deed by mentioning that the two traitors have been unable to find supplies in their own country. As the people of Scotland side with their king, they were forced to accept the services of mercenaries.
- It continues the dramatic build-up for Macbeth's arrival on stage. The captain depicts him in a highly positive light, as a valorous soldier, fighting bravely for king and country. He is '*Valour's minion*' (1.19). A Scottish nobleman, Rosse, praises him for his strength and bravery, and glorifies him as '*Bellona's bridegroom*'.
- Use of dramatic irony: The audience, even if facing a courageous warrior now, have not forgotten that the witches have chosen him as their next victim. This effect is further enhanced by the fact that the audience knows the Thane of Cawdor to be a traitor. As Macbeth will be invested with the same title, there is a probability that he might turn a traitor, too.
- Scene II presents King Duncan as a benevolent king, who is loved by his people for his justice and magnanimity. But at the same time one becomes aware of the fact that Duncan is old and weak. He has already suffered a revolt to take place, and he is unfit to lead his army against the enemy.
- At the end of scene II the spectator is led to believe that the order in Duncan's kingdom has been restored, at least momentarily.

### Scene 3 (Temptation Scene)

#### Part I: (The meeting of the witches)

- Importance of magical numbers, songs and dances to create an atmosphere of mystery.
- '*Sleep shall neither ..... tempest-tost*' (11.19-25)  
The power of the witches is limited to evil influence: the witch has the power to weaken the ship, but she cannot sink it. Similarly, they can influence Macbeth (his soul is compared to a 'bark') with evil thoughts, but it is Macbeth himself who will ultimately decide about his own ruin.
- The lack of sleep referred to here will also be one of Macbeth's punishments after he has committed the murder.

**Part II: (The meeting of Macbeth, Banquo and the witches)**

- "foul and fair" (a direct reference to Act I, scene 1) confirms our suspicion that there is a relation of "guilty sympathy" between Macbeth and the witches.
- The weather (thunder, rain and fog) underlines the general atmosphere of doubt and insecurity that fills the minds of the characters. Banquo and Macbeth seem to have lost their sense of direction. So when Banquo perceives the weird sisters, he does not know whether to believe his eyes or not, and he is even more at a loss when they have disappeared. Their imagination may have played a trick on the two generals (cf. ll. 80-82/84-86).
- The greetings of the witches provide the motivation force to the drama. The witches all-hail Macbeth in a definite, hierarchical order and unfold the cunning mechanism of evil at work, which is about to engulf its chosen victim. The first greeting is based on truth: Macbeth is the Thane of Glamis, a title which he got through nobility. The second greeting shows dramatic irony at work: it comes as a complete surprise to Macbeth, who does not yet know that the king has in the meantime invested him with this honour for his courage and loyalty. It is this second greeting that confuses his mind: again it is based on truth, as Macbeth can find out for himself when Rosse and Lenox appear. The third greeting, however, is like a blow that leaves him shaking and speechless (cf. 'start' and 'rapt'). It is the beginning of the inner working of guilty thoughts.
- The greetings to Banquo betray his inferior position: they are riddles, paradoxes which corroborate the theme of doubt that runs throughout the play and which makes it so difficult for the characters to distinguish between reality and unreality, truth and illusion.
- Banquo's descendants will be kings. In Holinshed's 'Chronicles' Banquo appears as Macbeth's acolyte. In Shakespeare's play he is not completely without ambition. When he follows Macbeth, he has his proper interest in mind, but, on the whole, he is an upright man. (James I considered himself as a direct descendant of Banquo.)

**Part III: (The mechanism of evil)**

- When Macbeth is presented with the title of 'Thane of Cawdor', we are reminded of the witches' greetings. Even if Banquo's first and instinctive reaction may be right, Macbeth is – first of all - attributed the title of 'thane' because of his valour.
- Macbeth's aside betrays the working of his guilty thoughts or hopes: he does not exclude the possibility of becoming king, although he painstakingly avoids mentioning it to Banquo, who after all cannot be deceived. Banquo is led by reason: he understands the stratagem of the powers of evil, whereas Macbeth's mind is confused. (cf. Act I, scene 3, ll. 122-126)

Soliloquy Act I, scene 3 (ll. 128-142) (The conflict of a divided mind)

- It is clear from the start that Macbeth is already prepared to play his role (also cf. images from the theatre: prologue, act, theme). If Banquo is led by reason, Macbeth is guided by

emotion, imaginativeness and ambition. He does not (or does not want to) understand the scheme of evil at work: he starts to analyse his situation, but always begins with wrong premises, and completely forgets that Banquo has already provided the solution to the riddle.

- The thought of murdering the king must have been lurking in Macbeth's mind before, but he is afraid of perpetrating the act: it is unnatural. His strong imagination pictures the horrible scene before his eyes and he cannot come to any decision. In the last lines he gives himself over to the illusion that chance may crown him and rule his destiny without his 'stir'.
- This soliloquy reveals the seed of evil that will give birth to the heinous crime and help fulfil the prophecy. Although Macbeth has made the effort to fight down his ambitions, his struggle is not convincing. It not only mirrors the confused state of Macbeth's mind, but also establishes a relation with the play in general and its most important themes, like the ambiguous nature of temptation, the dealings with the powers of darkness after a wrong choice, the ensuing sense of unreality, the unnaturalness of evil and the parallel relation of disorder in the microcosm (man) and the larger social organism (kingdom).

### Scene 4

- A picture of royal order and justice: the impression we have of Duncan as an innocent, benevolent and trusting ruler is enhanced. His lack of judgement concerning Cawdor's treachery (cf. ll. 11-14) finds a parallel in his wrong opinion about Macbeth.
- Macbeth wears the mask of courtly language: in very formal language he praises a subject's loyalty and duty to king and country as the highest values in the feudal system. His false, ornate profession of loyalty sharply contrasts with Banquo's rather austere, but honest acceptance of conferred honours.
- The re-establishment of order. When Duncan confers the succession to the throne upon his eldest son Malcolm, he has signed his own death sentence. Now Macbeth's illusion to become king 'without his stir' is destroyed. And by binding himself further to Macbeth through the bounds of hospitality, Duncan provides Macbeth with the best opportunity to get rid of the king.
- Macbeth's short soliloquy (ll. 48-53)

Macbeth invokes the night to hide his evil intentions, and with a command, he extinguishes the light of the stars. His murderous thoughts have become stronger. His 'single state of man' is destroyed: he is now composed of different elements, and it seems as if the eye and the hand belonged to different men. He leaves the stage obsessed by thoughts of darkness, evil and murder.

### Scene 5

- The relationship of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth is not without kindness: the terms in which they address each other are perfectly sincere (My dearest partner of greatness/My dearest love). So their humanity contrasts even more with the monstrosity of their projected deed.

- Lady Macbeth's first soliloquy (cf. ll. 13-28)

It is a masterful revelation of Macbeth's character and, implicitly, of her own determination to take quick decisions. Without any previous preparation for the audience, she appears as a determined, ruthless woman. Although she is committed to the greater glory of her husband, she has her own greatness in mind, too.

- Macbeth's character:

She realizes the existence of natural, human goodness in her husband: his nature is '*too full o' the milk of human kindness*'. Dominated by honour and nobility, he does not want to cheat, although he would gladly welcome the rewards of cheating, i.e. the crown. She perfectly knows about his inability to pursue a course of action once he starts thinking about it, and that is his great weakness. His ambition knows no limits, but the fear of consequences makes him hesitant and vacillating. The arrival of the king - from a dramatic point of view - enables her to carry out her plan.

- Lady Macbeth's second soliloquy (ll. 36-52)

She addresses a blasphemous prayer to the powers of darkness to fill her with hardness and cruelty. There is no hesitation, no thought of the consequences when she takes upon herself the arrangements of all the details. The main stress lies on the unnaturalness of the deed, which must be performed in the darkest of nights (cf. ll. 50-51). She tries to expel all her natural woman's feelings by invoking the spirits of evil to defeminize and dehumanize her. Night appears as a dark funeral blanket (a *pall*), which must hide the gruesome murder. The numerous imperative forms and the repetitions of '*come*' underline the effect of the prayer, and the poetic beauty of these marvellous lines contrasts with their horrible content.

- Introduction of the theme of equivocation (double or ambiguous meaning).

The stress in this last part of scene V lies on appearance versus reality, and is taken over into scene VI:

cf. ll. 60-61 : '*To beguile the time, ! Look like the time,*'

ll. 63-64 : '*Look like the innocent flower/But be the serpent under't.*'

ll. 69-70 : '*Only look up clear; ! To alter favour ever is to fear.*'

By now she completely dominates Macbeth's personality and has decided to take upon herself the organization of the crime.

### Scene 6

- The general atmosphere: Shakespeare stresses the contrast of appearance and reality by comparing the outside with the inside of Inverness Castle. The weather is fair, and the calm light of the evening underlines the general impression of peace and tranquillity.

- Lady Macbeth also appears as a perfect hostess, full of charm and dignity. She pretends to be the '*innocent flower*', welcoming her guest in a most humble way and telling Duncan that their gratitude is without limits. Her gracious behaviour contrasts with the horrible murder they have projected.
- Great moments of dramatic irony:
  - Duncan admires the castle where he will be murdered.
  - He leaves the scene, graciously taking his greatest enemy by the hand.

So the hardness necessary for the assassination of the king originates in her: she pours her evil spirits into Macbeth's mind and encourages him to commit the deed to make the prophecy come true.

### Scene 7

- In this soliloquy the motives that bring Macbeth to the decision that '*we will proceed no further in this business*' (1.31) are a mixture of good and bad and allow a division into five parts:

Part I ll. 1-7	His fear of consequences. His will is weakened by speculations. If he could be sure that there are no consequences in this world, he would risk the consequences in the next world, in the afterlife.
ll. 7-12	His fear of consequences on this earth: he is afraid that the deed will turn against its doer and that he will be punished in just proportion to his wickedness.
Part 2 ll. 12-16	He is Duncan's kinsman, subject and host. The feudal system dictates that he should owe him obedience, and, in accordance with the sacred laws of hospitality, he should protect him.
Part 3 ll. 16-25	Duncan has been an excellent king, well loved by his people.
Part 4 ll. 25-28	Nothing but his ' <i>vaulting ambition</i> ' spurs him to action.
Part 5 ll. 32-35	Duncan has honoured his general with great largesse, and people have a high opinion of Macbeth.

- Here Macbeth is presented as a true tragic hero who suffers from an intolerable temptation, and who is aware that his ambition will force him to the ground. His thoughts are full of doubt and foreboding disaster. His anguish moves our pity as we watch this once loyal subject hopelessly drift towards inevitable ruin.

- Lady Macbeth convinces her husband by employing two most woman-like weapons which hurt Macbeth's pride:

You are a coward, no real man. You don't love me any longer and are not worth my loving you.

When she has outlined the details of her wicked and cowardly plan, Macbeth is so confident now that he has no difficulty in '*mock(ing) the time with fairest show*'.

## MACBETH Act II

### Scene 1

- The conversation between Banquo and Fleance once more reveals the scarcity of technical means Shakespeare disposed of to create a midnight atmosphere in daytime; so his poetry had to compensate for this lack of visual techniques.
- A general atmosphere of presentiment governs this scene: as no stars illuminate the night sky, Macbeth's wish has come true. Banquo, plagued by '*cursed thoughts*' of the meeting with the witches, cannot rest, but he prays to the powers of Heaven to grant him repose.
- Soliloquy Act, scene 1, ll.33-61

Macbeth's conscience is not placated; his guilty feelings conjure up a 'fatal vision', which is nothing but a hallucination produced by his tortured imagination. When the dagger appears before his eyes for the second time, the crime seems already committed: drops of blood ooze from the weapon.

The evocation of night (ll. 49-61) acquires cosmic dimensions. Nature and natural feelings seem dead in the world: it is the time when strange, unnatural events take place, the time of witchcraft and murder, of wolves and rape. Macbeth identifies himself with the elements of darkness and is now completely bent on perpetrating the deed at the sound of the bell.

### Scene 2

- Shakespeare enhances the atmosphere of terror by ill-omened sounds (the shrieking of the owl), by staccato questions and answers, by Macbeth's loose imagination, until it culminates in the knocking on the gate.
- The stress in this scene lies on Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's opposing characters. After Macbeth has murdered the king, feelings of disgust at his own doing overwhelm him completely so that he even forgets to leave the daggers beside the servants, and cannot face going back. He is about to panic when he hears the knocking. He feels remorse for his deed as soon as he has perpetrated it, and knows that he has cut himself off from God, from goodness and future rest. It is this awareness that makes of him a true tragic hero.  
Lady Macbeth keeps a clear head in this emergency situation. Cool-headed she calms her husband and takes the daggers back herself. She immediately recognizes the knocking as that at the south gate and gives her husband the necessary directions to avoid suspicion.
- The scene is full of irony in the light of the forthcoming events. Lady Macbeth will become mad (l. 33) and Macbeth will be tormented by sleepless nights (ll. 34-35). No water can wash the blood off his hands, as it is the symbol of his guilt.

### Scene 3

#### The dramatic importance of the 'Porter Scene'

- A scene of comic relief and contrast which allows the audience, even if only for a moment, to relax from the former atmosphere of horror and to laugh at the (bawdy) jokes of the porter, who brings us back into the normal world. The scene is, however, not only one of comic relief, but is also closely related to the remaining part of the play. The three examples mentioned by the porter all refer to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: despair, equivocation and theft: all three lead to eternal suffering in hell.
- Dramatic irony: The porter imagines that he is a devil-porter at the gates of hell. And he is right because Macbeth's castle has indeed become hell on earth.
- It provides an impression of the passing of time between the actual murder and its discovery, enabling Macbeth and his wife to prepare for the coming part.
- Macbeth's reaction of fear at the knocking is not so much due to the fact that he might be discovered. He realizes instinctively that it is yet another of those ominous sounds heard during the night. Ironically, it is Macduff who knocks at the gate and who was born to kill Macbeth.
- The first premonition that something is wrong can be derived from the description of the terrible storm of the previous night: a description of evil and chaos in nature, and thus Macbeth's deed acquires cosmic dimensions, too. Now that the God-appointed king is dead, the whole state is threatened with destruction.

#### The discovery of the murder

- Importance of the murder in relation to the universe and to Macbeth (ll. 89-92)
- "(Macbeth) declares that if he had died an hour before then he would have lived a good life in a holy time, a time when all was well because a God-appointed king preserved true order and security of the world. Now, with the death of the King, there is no more order, holiness or security. 'Renown and grace', the best things in life, are dead. All is meaningless and bitter. It is the truth of this that Macbeth has to discover in the rest of the play; the horrible truth of a life without God, without order and with no more purpose than the hopeless and increasingly bloody business of trying to keep himself secure. The greatness of Macbeth lies in his experience of this, in his deeply poetic expression of the futility of his life. From this moment on he becomes ever more tyrannical and bloody, ever more cruel, a monster and a tyrant; but - and this is the crucial point - he is not simply a man becoming even lower than the beasts. He is the wreck of a great man who suffers and understands the consequences of what he has done." (Penguin Passnotes on 'Macbeth', Penguin, pp. 32-33)
- Malcolm and Donalbain's escape

The King's sons draw suspicion upon themselves by their flight and leave the throne to Macbeth. They ensured their personal safety, but did not pay heed to their public duty as rightful heirs. At this moment it is without any doubt the wisest political decision, as both their lives are in immediate danger.

### **Scene 4**

- Scene 4 is a short scene of transition. Macbeth's plans have been carried out successfully. He is to be invested in Scone and suspicion has fallen upon Duncan's sons.
- The scene underlines the unnaturalness of the murder by showing its effect on the people of Scotland as a whole, of which the old man is a representative. The murder has brought lasting darkness to Scotland, to the order of nature with its peace and harmony. Even the animals behave in a strange, unnatural way. The turbulence in the macrocosm reflects the enormity of Macbeth's crime. But the scene ends on a human note of Christian hope that the traditional values will be restored.

### **Revision Questions on Act II**

- 1) Trace the development of the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth up to the murder of Duncan.
- 2) Show how Lady Macbeth's will bears down on her husband's.
- 3) Discuss the dramatic importance of the Porter scene and of scene 4 in general.
- 4) Comment on the way Macbeth and his wife act their parts after the discovery of the murder.

## MACBETH Act III

### Scene 1

- Banquo's soliloquy (ll. 1 - 10)

Banquo entertains no open complicity with Macbeth, and his suspicions are well founded. But he does nothing to reveal the truth either, perhaps because he knows that it is sinful to conspire against the invested king, or because he hopes that the witches' prophecies will come true for him as well.

- The stress in this scene lies on metaphors of fertility versus sterility. Banquo (and, in particular his issue) are connected with fertility (cf. ll. 5,59,64,79,88) and Macbeth with sterility (cf. ll. 4, 60-63).
- Macbeth reveals his clever handling of Banquo (ll. 11-39). He avoids suspicion by continuously expressing his wish to have Banquo as a chief guest at his banquet. At the same time he cleverly finds out crucial information for the planned murder. (ll. 18, 23, 35).
- Macbeth's soliloquy (ll. 48 - 71)

This soliloquy once more presents a man utterly plagued by feelings of fear and insecurity, and a sense of inferiority in relation to Banquo. We first get a picture of Banquo's character as Macbeth sees him: a man of regal nature, with an indomitable courage and prudent wisdom, who knows exactly what he is doing. Macbeth is wrong when he believes that his fate can be changed and that the witches' prophecies can be altered to fit his own situation. The irony of his fate resides in the fact that he has really killed Duncan for Banquo's seed (cf. repetition of the pronoun 'them'). At this moment he has nothing else on his mind but Banquo's issue.

- The meeting with the murderers

The murderers are no professional criminals: they have been wronged in one way or another, and – ironically - by Macbeth. The scene shows Macbeth's power of manipulation, which is also the true mark of a tyrant. It is interesting to notice that Macbeth uses the same weapons as his wife: they are cowards if they do not perpetrate the deed.

### Scene 2

- Lady Macbeth realizes that a sense of guilt has taken hold of both of them and created an atmosphere of unnatural alienation. Although they both share the same thoughts (namely that conscience returns to plague the evil-doers), they are unable to communicate. Macbeth has detached himself completely from his wife. To escape the mind-torturing 'scorpions' of the first murder he will have to commit a fourth.
- (ll. 13-26) This speech is characterized by images of restlessness. Macbeth, more and more independent from now on, no longer bothers to confide in his wife and has taken the initiative in

evil. In the ensuing acts of wickedness, he will recover his 'single state of man', if only momentarily. He concludes his soliloquy with a powerful evocation of night, which he orders to conceal his dark purposes and overturn the laws of nature.

### **Scene 3**

- In this scene of action, Shakespeare creates an atmosphere of distrust and danger, and the best-suited time is night. The evil deed to be performed once again contrasts with the poetic lines Shakespeare puts in the mouth of the murderer (cf. ll. 5-8).
- Dramatic importance: Fleance escapes and thus the witches' prophecies are fulfilled. Banquo's murder was useless in the end, and Macbeth's mind will still be 'full of scorpions'.

### **Scene 4**

- The Banquet Scene

The banquet symbolizes conviviality, brotherly love, good relationships and, on a more universal level, natural order in the microcosm 'state'. The interruption of the banquet is equivalent to the destruction of this harmony. At the beginning of the scene everything is arranged in the proper ceremonial way: The guests are invited to sit down in accordance with their social ranks. This order is broken up by Lady Macbeth at the end of the scene, when she urges the guests not to trouble about the proper social order of leaving.

- The meeting with the murderer

Macbeth leaves the banquet as he did before, when Duncan was under his roof. The ceremony is interrupted by the appearance of the murderer. Fleance's escape corroborates the prophecies of the witches and is partly responsible for Macbeth's ensuing fit of madness.

- The appearance of the ghost

The ghost is a hallucination, only seen by Macbeth, an externalized form of his guilty conscience, of his fear of discovery: it reminds him of his own wicked deed. That is the reason why the ghost appears whenever Macbeth speaks about Banquo's absence.

His wife's reaction: She tries to calm him down and protects him from possible suspicions. She does not chide him after the lords have gone, although it is absolutely clear that he has betrayed himself openly. This is the last entrance of Lady Macbeth as a sane person, loyal to her husband and in complete control of herself and of the situation in general.

- Macbeth's awareness of his dilemma

He realizes that there is no way out but to resume the series of murders already begun. His greatest mistake is that he has not yet understood he has become the plaything of fate. He still lives with the illusion that the witches will provide a solution to his problem.

### **Scene 5**

- In this rather spurious scene the witches are commanded by Hecate to speed up Macbeth's downfall by removing his fear and showing him ambiguous truths to 'draw him on to his confusion'.

### **Scene 6**

- Lennox points to Macbeth's tyranny by analysing the recent events. Although he speaks in a highly ironical way and does not accuse Macbeth openly at first, his meaning is quite clear. He is first trying to find out about the Lord's political opinions and then only characterizes Macbeth as a tyrant.
- The Lord places his hope in Macduff, and hopes that the latter can urge the King of England to help the people of Scotland. This is the first spark of hope leading towards the restoration of order in Scotland.

### **Revision Questions**

- 1) Why does Banquo keep his suspicions of Macbeth to himself?
- 2) How does Macbeth find out about Banquo's movements on the night of the banquet without arousing his suspicions?
- 3) Why doesn't Macbeth take his wife into his confidence with regard to the murder of Banquo?
- 4) Comment on Lady Macbeth's handling of the situation at the banquet.
- 5) Analyse the importance of dramatic irony in Act III, with close reference to several instances.
- 6) 'Macbeth has taken the major steps necessary for the achievement of his goal.' Discuss.

## MACBETH Act IV

### Scene 1

- Creation of an evil, gruesome atmosphere where witchcraft is at work.
- In his invocation of chaos (ll. 50-61) (images of confusion) Macbeth reveals himself as the master destroyer, disdaining all achievements of civilization (religion, trade, agriculture and architecture). Merely interested in knowing his future, he is determined to proceed in his path of destruction at whatever cost.
- Shakespeare underlines the parallelism between Act I,3 and Act IV,1 by presenting the prophecies of the witches in a similar way. The first apparition tells Macbeth what he already knows and thus makes him accept the other two riddles readily. Although, by now, he knows that the witches represent evil, he does not bother analysing their prophecies: he is too sure of himself. When he condemns '*all those that trust them*', he does not realize that this curse is like a double-edged sword directed against own person.
- When Lenox tells him that Macduff has fled to England, his anger turns to murderous rage. Like a raving dog he seeks his revenge and blindly rushes into action. Now, there is no longer any hesitation between the thought and the deed. The hideous murder of Lady Macduff and her son will culminate his career of a power-seeking tyrant.

### Scene 2

- The murder of Lady Macduff and her son is most revolting because it is the result of sheer spite: there is no purpose in it at all.
- The mother's deep sense of loneliness arises from the feeling of pity, but it also shows her political naivety. She only realizes that she is helpless in this situation and thus does not understand that her husband's flight was 'political wisdom'. Yet, on the other hand, he has betrayed his family, too; and he should have foreseen that Macbeth's cruelty knows no limits.
- The child's prattle before the murder conveys an even more pathetic impression of helplessness and innocence, thus stressing the brutality of the murder. This scene is representative of the suffering of innocent victims in a state dominated by tyranny.

### Scene 3

#### Part I : The testing of Macduff.

- This scene comments on Macbeth as a bad king and on his evil actions on the one hand; on the other hand it concentrates on Malcolm's character and his abilities to serve the future of his country.

- The stress lies on the reversal of values, on the difficulty in distinguishing between appearance and reality. But this time the theme of reversed values serves a good purpose. If Malcolm accuses himself of being intemperate, avaricious and deceitful, it is only to test Macduff's loyalty to himself and the country, because he might after all have been a double agent.

### Part II: A description of Edward the Confessor

- This short, but relevant interlude opposes the saintly King of England to the tyrant Macbeth. Edward received his powers of healing and of prophecy from Heaven, and they sharply contrast with those of the witches derived from hell. Edward will also cure Scotland from the plague that is now besetting it in the devilish form of Macbeth.

### Part III: Macduff's grief

- Macduff's grief at the news of his family's annihilation is genuine (cf. Macbeth's false grief after the murder of Duncan). Shakespeare cleverly renders honest feelings of grief with an utter scarcity of words. Macduff is too deeply hurt; he cannot find the words to express his sorrow. Later these feelings of grief turn to anger and he will become the bearer of divine justice. The scene ends with a spark of hope: the long night of suffering will finally be followed by a day of relief.

### Questions on Act IV

- 1) What do you think of Macduff's decision to flee his country and to leave his wife and children behind?
- 2) Are Malcolm's suspicions of Macduff justified?
- 3) Describe a) the way Ross unburdens his news to Macduff  
b) the effect it has on Macduff.

## MACBETH Act V

### Scene 1

- In the 'sleep-walking' scene, Lady Macbeth's suppressed feelings pierce through in her dreams. She has repressed not only her own and Macbeth's murderous secrets, but also her womanly nature. Now that L.M.'s mind is no longer alert and that her nervous energy is exhausted, Nature is taking her revenge. L.M. re-enacts the whole situation of the 'after-the-murder' scenes with tragically ironic undertones.
- In this scene Lady Macbeth is no longer presented as a purely evil woman. She is a mad creature, broken by the strain of her guilty feelings. Her suffering consists of lasting memories of guilt, uttered in an incoherent, fragmented way. She is unable to sleep. The memories of the past heavily burden her down and condemn her to the same punishment that is harrying Macbeth. Driven to utter despair by her insanity, she will finally envisage suicide as the only solution to end her eternal sufferings, which, being those of a '*sick soul*' (not of a body) are beyond natural cure.

### Scene 2

- Besides being a comment on the action taking its course in the English camp, this scene also presents Macbeth's isolation and thus constitutes a parallel to scene I. The forces of the Scottish resistance and the army of liberation prepare for the siege of Dunsinane Castle. Macbeth stands on the edge of madness. His '*valiant fury*' can no longer hold together his single state of man, nor can he control his rebellious country. He is still obeyed because people are terrified, but not because their loyalty should urge them to fight for the king.
- This scene closes with images of healing, thus underlining the justice of the revolt against Macbeth. It is diametrically opposed in purpose to Act I, sc. 2, where the invaders (the Norwegians) tried to oust Duncan with help from within. In Act V, sc. 2 the invaders will see to it that justice be done and bring the legal heir to the throne.

### Scene 3

- In an outburst of '*valiant fury*', bordering on madness, Macbeth desperately clings to the predictions of the witches. The trust he puts in these evil forces is pathetic. He still believes that he has been told all these promises for his own good, once more ignoring the fact that the witches' foretelling has come true so far. The fear he perceives in his servants gives rise to an eruption of anger and fury, which subsequently drive him to the border of despair.
- (11. 20-28) In these lines, the futility of Macbeth's existence is expressed in marvellous language. In a moment of self-pity he realizes that he has reached the autumn of his life and has nothing left to live for. Unlike Duncan, who, in his old age, was surrounded by friends who honoured and obeyed him, Macbeth is now forced to accept people who hate him.
- Macbeth wants Scotland to be cured, to be purged of the English forces. He is not aware that he himself is the source of the disease that has beset his country.

### Scenes 4 and 5

- Macbeth's power is undermined by the strong army of English and Scottish forces on the march and by his own increasing isolation and exhaustion. He can no longer be affected by horror: He has forgotten '*the taste of fears*'. His attitude of total indifference is shown best at the death of his wife.
- (ll. 17-28): The future is seen from the point of view of the present: it is a mere continuation of the absurd situation he is in now. His is the attitude of a man who has betrayed all that makes life worth living for. The future, like the past and the present, only reveals the futility of life, whose ultimate reality is '*nothing*', the unfathomable void.
- At last Macbeth is more and more forced to recognize the '*equivocation of the fiend*'. His despair makes him utter a last egoistic wish: he would like to destroy the whole world. Disgusted with life, he decides to die at least with '*harness on the back*'.

### Scenes 6 to 9

- The order that rules the English army strongly contrasts with the chaotic situation in the castle. Macbeth, like a wounded animal, is about to be beaten, but he still clings desperately to the last prediction. After his victory over young Siward, he resumes new courage, believing that he bears a charmed life. He does not opt for the '*Roman*' solution to escape being captured. Yet unconscious fear shakes his state of man when he faces Macduff, the man who was destined to kill him.
- When the latter tells him of his 'unnatural' birth, Macbeth finally realizes the scope of the witches' equivocating predictions. Yet he cannot accept surrender, i.e. humiliation. Like a valiant war machine he throws himself into the battle and dies a noble death befitting a tragic hero.

The closing scene ends with the triumphant restoration of natural order. Malcolm becomes the representative of this new epoch which is characterized by greater social stability.

### Questions on Act V

- 1) Point out the incidents of the play referred to in Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking.
- 2) How are the prophecies of the witches fulfilled in this act?
- 3) In what spirit does Macbeth meet his end?