



Jon Finch and Francesca Annis in
'The Tragedy of Macbeth' by Roman Polanski, 1971

Macbeth

Compact Performer - Culture & Literature
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Margaret Layton © 2015

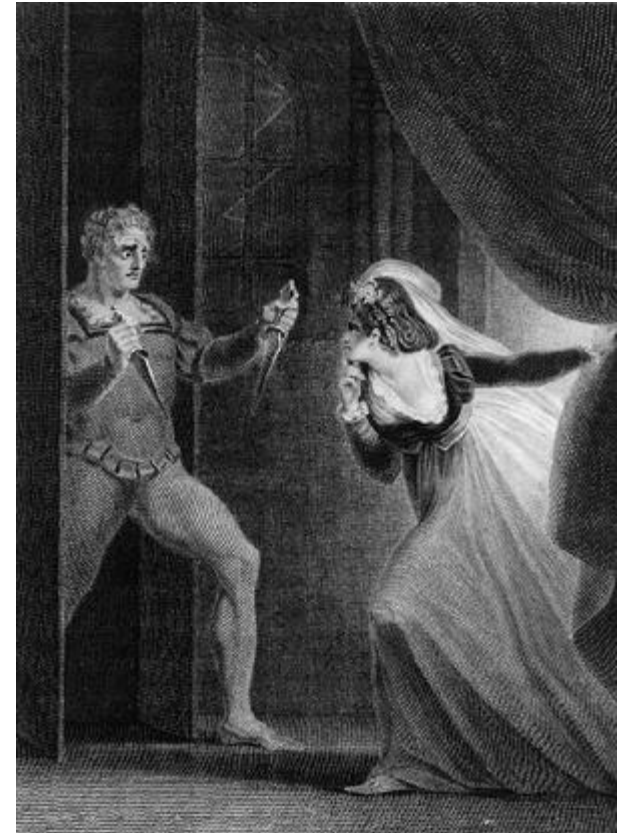
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1. Main characteristics

- The **shortest** of Shakespeare's tragedies.
- Complex **psychological analysis** of what takes place in the mind of the criminal.
- There is **no villain** against the hero.
- Macbeth begins as a brave warrior but, led by **ambition**, he chooses **evil** and becomes a murderous tyrant.

→ **Parable of the tragic hero.**

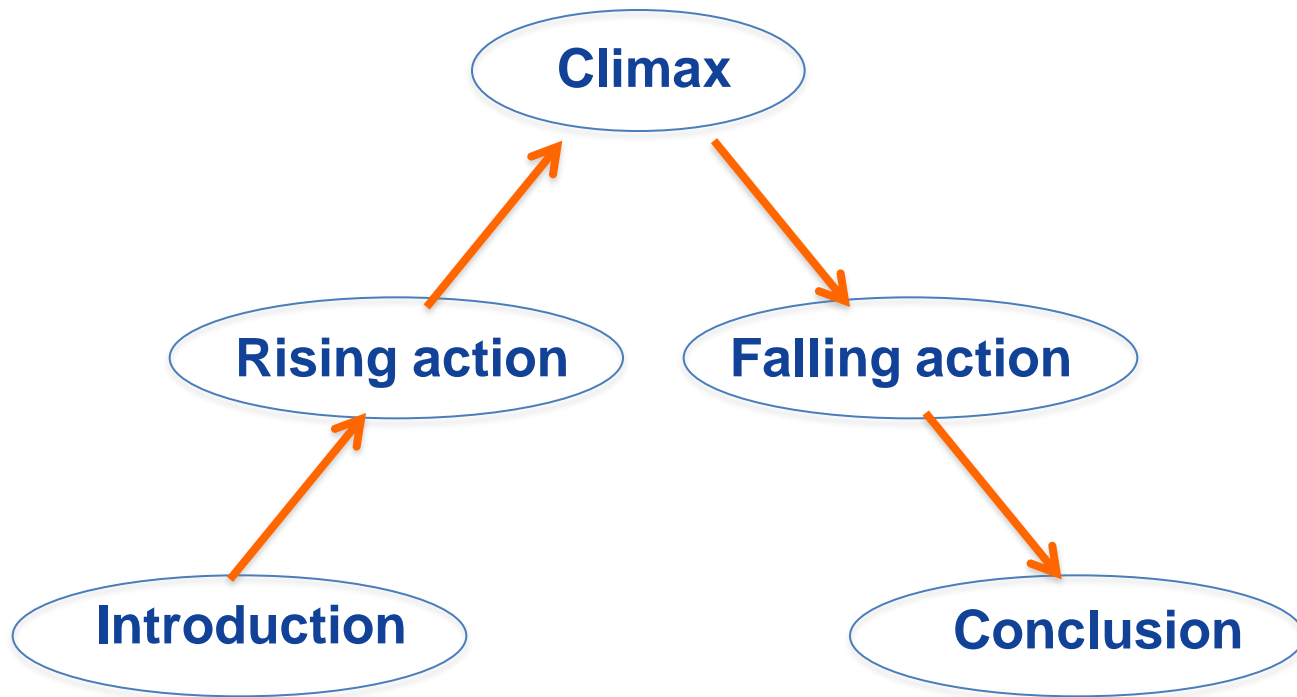


James Heath, *I have done the deed*, 1888.
Kansas City, Carbonell-Weinglass Collection



2. Dramatic structure

Symmetrical development

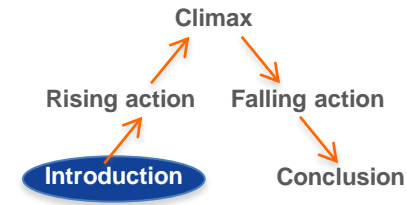




Macbeth

2. Dramatic structure

Symmetrical development



The three Witches in 'Macbeth' by John Barnes, 1964

Introduction



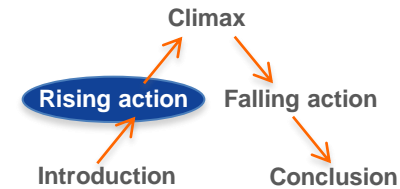
The first two scenes: the appearance of **the three witches** and the news of **Macbeth's bravery** in battle.



Macbeth

2. Dramatic structure

Symmetrical development



Rising action



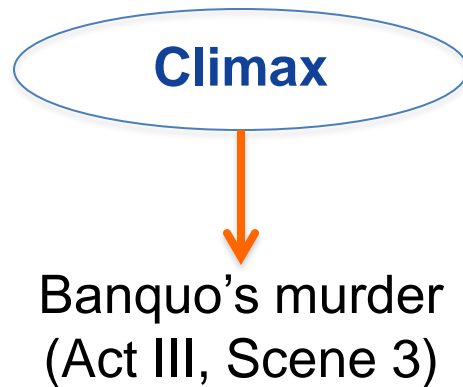
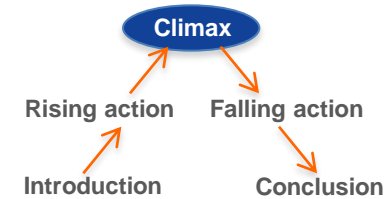
Macbeth meets the three witches:
their prophecy begins to work on **his ambition**. He kills Duncan.



Macbeth

2. Dramatic structure

Symmetrical development





Macbeth

2. Dramatic structure

Symmetrical development

Falling action



Fleance's escape



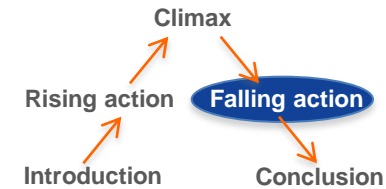
the banquet scene



arousing of Macduff



Macbeth retreats to Dunsinane
Castle



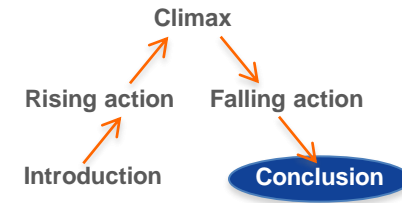
Théodore Chassériau (1819-1856), *Macbeth seeing the ghost of Banquo*, 1854. Musée des Beaux-Arts, Reims



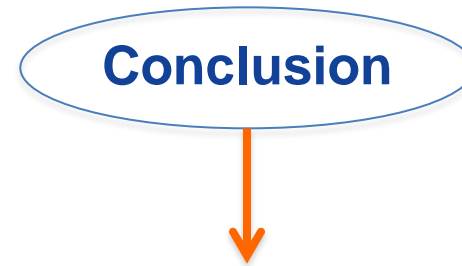
Macbeth

2. Dramatic structure

Symmetrical development



Henry Fuseli, *Lady Macbeth sleepwalking*, 1798, Musée du Louvre



Final fall and **death of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth**



Macbeth

3. Themes

- a. Regicide, as an act against Nature, brings chaos.
- b. Reversal of values:
'Fair is foul, and foul is fair'
(the Three Witches)
- c. Future time: is the future pre-ordered, fixed, or is it the result of individual activity?



Henry Fuseli, Macbeth, *Banquo and the Three Witches*, 1793. Petworth House, National Trust.



4. Features of a tragic hero

1. Nobility of birth or **wisdom**.
2. A **flaw**, either a mistake in the character's actions or in his personality that leads to a downfall.
3. A **reversal of fortune** caused by his flaw.
4. The **realisation** that the reversal was brought about by the hero's own actions.
5. The audience has to feel pity and fear (**catharsis**) for the character.



5. Style

- A striking use of **imagery**:
 - **similes**
*'The sleeping and the dead are but **as** pictures'*
(Act II, Scene 2)
 - **metaphors**
*'Life's but a **walking shadow**'*
(Act V, Scene 5)
 - **symbols**
*'the innocent **Sleep**'*
*'A little **water** clears us of this deed'*
(Act II, Scene 2)



6. The characters

Macbeth

- a brave general, leader of Duncan's army together with Banquo;
- urged into action by his wife;
- lacks moral courage;
- ambitious and superstitious;
- becomes cruel and unscrupulous.



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6. The characters



John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*, 1889, Tate Gallery, London.

Lady Macbeth

- suppresses her natural instinct to plan the murder;
- strong-willed, supports Macbeth in his weakness;
- devoted to her husband, she ends up in madness.



6. The characters

King Duncan

- peaceful and refined;
- shows poor judgement of human nature.



Banquo

- a contrast to Macbeth in his modesty;
- does not follow temptation like Macbeth.



6. The characters



Macduff

- becomes important after Banquo's murder.
- noble, loyal, patriotic
- kills Macbeth at the end.

Malcom

- Duncan's son.
- Becomes king of Scotland after Macbeth's death.





7. The supernatural

- The **Three Witches** and their prophecies lead Macbeth to success.
- The **chaos of nature** on the night of Duncan's murder.
- Banquo's **ghost**.



Henry Fuseli, *The Three Witches*,
1788, Zurich, Kunsthaus



The three witches (text on page 54)

- They appear at the beginning of the play, on an empty stage, out of normal TIME and PLACE, outside day-to-day life, outside any logical common sense.
- The atmosphere: it's raining (thunder and lightning).
- They exchange a series of questions and answers and they say that they will meet again in the future (before the sun sets), when the confusion is over, on the heath.
- They are associated with a cat and a toad.
- They introduce the theme of confusion (*hurlyburly*), and of the reversal of values (*The battle is lost and won; fair is foul, and foul is fair*).



Duncan's murder (page 55-56)

- It's a **dialogue** between Macbeth and his wife, from which we understand better the nature of the two characters.
- They have just killed King Duncan, committing **an act against nature**. The murder is never mentioned directly, but they call it “the deed”, “a sorry sight”.
- Macbeth hears voices, they are hallucinations that underline his **sense of guilt** and remorse. He seems fragile and disoriented, he is not even able to pray any more (ll 20-25). He talks about **sleep** using some metaphors (ll 29-37) that underline the idea of relief, rest and peace associated with sleep. He foreshadows his own punishment when he says “Macbeth shall sleep no more”. Sleep is also associated with death, because they appear similar (l. 31 “*the death of each day's life*”, ll. 50-51 “*the sleeping and the dead are but as pictures*”)



Macbeth

- **Lady Macbeth** gives her husband some practical advice (*“consider it not so deeply”* I. 22, *“go, get some water and wash...”*, *“go, carry them and smear the sleepy grooms with blood...”* II. 40-44).

She’s strong, determined and dominates her husband. She has an active role in the murder, staining the guards with blood to make them appear guilty.



Macbeth's last monologue (page 57)

- It's at the end of the play, when Macbeth is told the news of his wife's death.
- He's not able to react. Shakespeare shows us what happens in the mind of a criminal: he has committed so many crimes that he has "forgotten the taste of fears" (l. 3). In the past he would have been scared, but now he has become numb, insensible and indifferent, like a real criminal.
- Macbeth refers to the ineluctable **power of time** (ll 12-18), that inexorably passes by in our lives, and describes **life** with a series of metaphors (ll. 18-23: *a brief candle, a walking shadow, a poor player on the stage, a tale told by an idiot*), all emphasizing the idea of the transience of life, of the short duration of man's life. Life has also lost its meaning for Macbeth ("*signifying nothing*").