

Shakespeare's Macbeth

Act 2, scene 1

It is after midnight in Inverness. Banquo talks with his son Fleance and notices the stars aren't shining. He prays for angels to "restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature gives way to in repose" (lines 7-8)

Macbeth enters. Banquo tells Macbeth his sleep has been troubled by dreams of the weird sisters. Macbeth claims never to think about them. But he suggests they talk about the witches soon, and adds that if Banquo supports him when the time comes he'll reward and honor Banquo for it.



Banquo says he'll be receptive to what Macbeth has to say provided he loses no honor in seeking to gain more. Banquo and Fleance head off to bed.

Alone, Macbeth sees a bloody dagger floating in the air. He can't grasp it, and can't decide whether it's a phantom or his imagination.

Offstage, Lady Macbeth rings the bell to signal that Duncan's attendants are asleep. Macbeth goes to murder Duncan.

In earlier times, the duties of a host were very important. Only major cities had inns for travelers. Therefore, travelers were often forced to stay at a stranger's house. A host was expected to provide a guest with food, shelter, and protection. Harming a guest was considered a terrible crime.

A visitor also followed strict codes of behavior. He or she was expected to honor the host, often by giving fine gifts.

As you read scene I, notice how the King repays Macbeth and Lady Macbeth for their hospitality. Then contrast the King's words and actions with Macbeth's plans for him.

Act 2, scene 1

Hyperbole

a figure by which things are represented as being greater or less than they really are. Hyperbole is an exaggerated statement.

"What hands are here? ha! *they pluck out mine eyes*. Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clean from my hand? No, this hand will rather. The *multitudinous seas incarnadine, Making the green one red.*" II. i. 123-127.

Macbeth

Act 2, scene 1

Soliloquy

Soliloquy: a speech delivered to the audience rather than to other characters in the play, in which the speaker explores his/her thoughts and feelings

The focus of the soliloquy, the invisible dagger, is our first glimpse of Macbeth's powerful imagination – imagination that is largely responsible for his mental torment throughout the drama.

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee.
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not **fatal** vision, sensible
To feeling as to sight? or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as palpable
As this which now I draw.
Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going;
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,
Or else worth all the rest; I see thee still,
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
Which was not so before. There's no such thing:

surprised to see the dagger

fatal - having to do with fate

fatal - deadly

heat-oppressed brain - it was believed that heat would cause fever and delirium

Either Macbeth's sight is being fooled by his other senses or else his sight alone is the only sense to be trusted.

Act 2, scene 1

It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one halfworld
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep; witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabouts,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

[a bell rings]

I go, and it is done; the bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

guilt is making him see things

resolved to kill Duncan

Act 2, scene 1

The Dagger Soliloquy

Themes

The Supernatural: Seeing the dagger could just be Macbeth's imagination "A dagger of the mind" as he says, or it could be the work of the supernatural as it seems to urge him towards Duncan's bedroom.

The Overturning of the Natural Order: By killing the King Macbeth is upsetting the natural order of things.

Act 2, scene 1

The Dagger Soliloquy

Shakespeare's Language

Alliteration. This is where a sentence has two or more words beginning with the same letter.

Example: "It is the **bloody business** which informs" (line 48). By repeating the "B" sound it makes Macbeth sound as if he is spitting the words out, making him seem guilty.

Personification. This is where something that isn't a human is described as if it actually is.

Example: "Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder,/Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,/Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace./With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design/Moves like a ghost." (lines 53-57)

Murder is described as if it is a human, who being alerted by his dog is now walking silently towards his victim. By personifying murder it makes Macbeth himself seem less responsible for the murder.

Rhyming Couplets. Shakespeare uses two sets of rhyming couplets at the end of his soliloquy.

Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives:

Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

.....

Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell

That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

The couplets tell us that Macbeth has firmly decided to kill the King, while also reminding us of the language of the witches.