PART 2 A Passion for Power

During Shakespeare's lifetime there were frequent struggles for political control in and around the court of Elizabeth I and her successor, James I. Many of Shakespeare's history plays as well as his tragedies deal with political conflict and the never-ending struggle to achieve a balance between power, justice, and legitimate authority in society. Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* is one of the definitive studies of the effect of power and ambition on the mind and soul. Who should be king and how political power should be first gained and then secured are among the issues addressed in this play.

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"He was not of an age, but for all time!"

—*Ben Jonson*

HIS LIFE
HIS TIMES

Master Playwright and Poet

With his brilliant poetic language and keen insight into human nature, William Shakespeare is generally regarded as the world's greatest writer in the English language. His plays are more widely translated than any other works except the Bible. Yet his life remains something of a mystery, with many details lost in the swirl of time.

1564–1616

"I COULD A TALE UNFOLD" Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a busy market town on the Avon River, northwest of London. Though the precise date of his birth is not known, church records indicate that he was baptized on April 26, 1564. Unlike most other writers of his era, he did not come from a noble family with close ties to the English court. The Shakespeares were what today we would call middle class, although his father, a glove maker, once served as the equivalent of mayor of Stratford.

Though no record of Shakespeare's schooling survives, it is assumed that he attended the local grammar school in Stratford. Again unlike most other writers of his day, Shakespeare did not

1564 **Is born in Stratford-upon-Avon**

Tudor house in Stratford

1572 **Family suffers a decline in fortune, loses most land holdings**

1560 1565 1570 1575

1558 **Elizabeth I becomes queen; England returns to the Protestant faith.**

Elizabeth I

1572 **Protestants massacred in Paris on St. Bartholomew's Day.**

This Elizabethan drawing is believed to be of Anne Hathaway.

go on to a university; instead, at the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he would have three children. After their birth, the documentary record of Shakespeare's life is once again blank for several years. When he can next be placed, he was in London, working as an actor and beginning to be noticed as a playwright.

"This Realm, This England" The London to which Shakespeare came was at the center of a nation just emerging as a major European power. In 1588, the English defeated the powerful Spanish Armada, a fleet of ships carrying a Spanish invasion force to England. In the wake of this victory, London flourished as a commercial center.

The arts, with the support of Queen Elizabeth I, flourished as well. The queen spent much of her time in London, where celebrated literary figures of the day—the poets Edward Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney, among them—visited the royal court. She also enjoyed pageants and plays, as well as the more sophisticated entertainment of classical literature. Attracted by England's vitality, commercial and artistic people from other countries soon began flocking to London, a bustling city of nearly 200,000 people. London's first public theaters sprang up across the Thames River in suburban Southwark. Both the mighty and the humble became avid theatergoers.

LITERARY *Contributions*

Poetic Drama Shakespeare is best known for his **verse drama,** plays in which most of the dialogue is in the form of poetry. In all, he wrote 37 plays, including the following:

All's Well That Ends Well
Antony and Cleopatra
As You Like It
The Comedy of Errors
Hamlet
Henry IV, Parts I and II
Henry V
Julius Caesar
King Lear
Love's Labour's Lost
Macbeth
Measure for Measure
The Merchant of Venice
The Merry Wives of Windsor
A Midsummer Night's Dream
Othello
Richard II
Richard III
Romeo and Juliet
The Taming of the Shrew
The Tempest
Twelfth Night
The Two Gentlemen of Verona
The Winter's Tale

Narrative Poetry In addition to his famous sonnets, Shakespeare wrote two highly regarded narrative poems, ***Venus and Adonis*** (1593) and ***The Rape of Lucrece*** (1594), when the London theaters had to shut down because of an outbreak of plague.

1582 **Marries Anne Hathaway**

1583 **Birth of first child, Susanna**

1585 **Birth of twins, Hamnet and Judith**

1590–92 ***The Comedy of Errors*** **and** ***Henry VI*** **in London**

1594–96 **Joins the Lord Chamberlain's Men**

1596 **Death of Hamnet at age 11**

1580 | **1585** | **1590** | **1595**

1577–80 **English explorer Sir Francis Drake sails around the world.**

1587 **Elizabeth executes her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots.**

1588 **England defeats the Spanish Armada.**

1591 ***Astrophel and Stella*** **by Sir Philip Sidney is published.**

1592–94 **Plague forces closing of London theaters.**

"All the World's a Stage" The first extant mention of William Shakespeare's presence on London's literary scene is in a 1592 pamphlet mocking his dramatic efforts. Already famous enough to be criticized (the rival dramatist Robert Greene referred to Shakespeare bitterly as an "upstart crow"), he became a member of the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company of actors whose patron was an influential member of Elizabeth's court. Shakespeare's plays helped to make the company successful—so successful that the queen herself attended its productions. Although the precise dating of Shakespeare's plays is uncertain, his early masterpieces include *Richard III, The Comedy of Errors, The Taming of the Shrew,* and *Romeo and Juliet.* By 1598, one scholar was praising Shakespeare as England's finest playwright: "As Plautus and Seneca are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins," wrote Francis Meres, "so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage."

Shakespeare's fame was accompanied by a financial success that allowed him to become a partner in London's new Globe Theatre and to purchase a fine home, called New Place, in Stratford. He also paid to obtain a coat of arms for his father, perhaps in an effort to improve his family's social position.

When Elizabeth's Scottish cousin James succeeded her in 1603, the Lord Chamberlain's Men became the King's Men, and the company's domination of the London stage continued. In 1608, Shakespeare and the other leading members of the King's Men even leased a second London theater, the Blackfriars, which was better equipped for winter performances.

"Our Revels Now Are Ended" After 1608, Shakespeare curtailed his theatrical activities and spent more time back in Stratford. He wrote no plays after 1613; his last complete dramas are believed to be *The Winter's Tale, The Tempest,* and *Henry VIII.* He died in 1616 and was buried in his parish church in Stratford. His famous epitaph, which he may have written himself, reads:

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones.

More Online: Author Link
www.mcdougallittell.com

1603 **Receives royal license for the King's Men**

1605–6 **First performances of *King Lear* and *Macbeth***

1608 **Leases London's Blackfriars Theatre**

1611–12 **First performance of *The Tempest***

1616 **Dies on April 23**

1600 | 1605 | 1610 | 1615

1600 **East India Company receives a royal charter.**

1603 **Elizabeth I dies; James VI of Scotland becomes James I of England.**

James I

1611 **King James translation of the Bible appears.**

To Be or Not to Be *Shakespeare*

Because documentary evidence of his life is scanty and his origins and education were relatively humble, some people have for centuries speculated that Shakespeare did not write the works attributed to him. Such theories persist even though they have no basis in solid fact and many scholars dispute them. Here are some of the nearly 60 people who have been offered by various sources as the real Shakespeare.

William Stanley Earl of Derby

A most unlikely candidate, he is not known to have written a single line of blank verse.

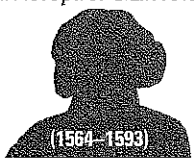
Edward de Vere Earl of Oxford

De Vere became a candidate simply because he fit someone's profile of qualities that any "Shakespeare" should possess.

Francis Bacon

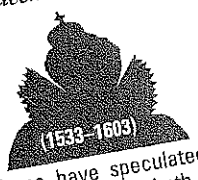
"The Baconian controversy" is the name given to the once-popular belief in some circles that this English philosopher and essayist is the actual author of Shakespeare's plays.

Christopher Marlowe



Because some passages from Shakespeare's early work closely resemble Marlowe's work, a theory arose that Marlowe lived abroad to escape his enemies. He may have sent his plays to an actor he knew, Shakespeare.

Queen Elizabeth I



Some have speculated that Queen Elizabeth I was the actual author, arguing that only someone of royal background could develop the depth of knowledge required to produce works of such eloquence.

1623
Death of Anne Shakespeare; First Folio publication of Shakespeare's plays

1620 | **1625** | **1630** | **1635**

1620
Pilgrims establish the Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts.

1625
James I dies; his son Charles becomes king.

1628
The duke of Buckingham, a favorite of James I, is assassinated.

The English Renaissance Theater

From the Courtyard to the Globe

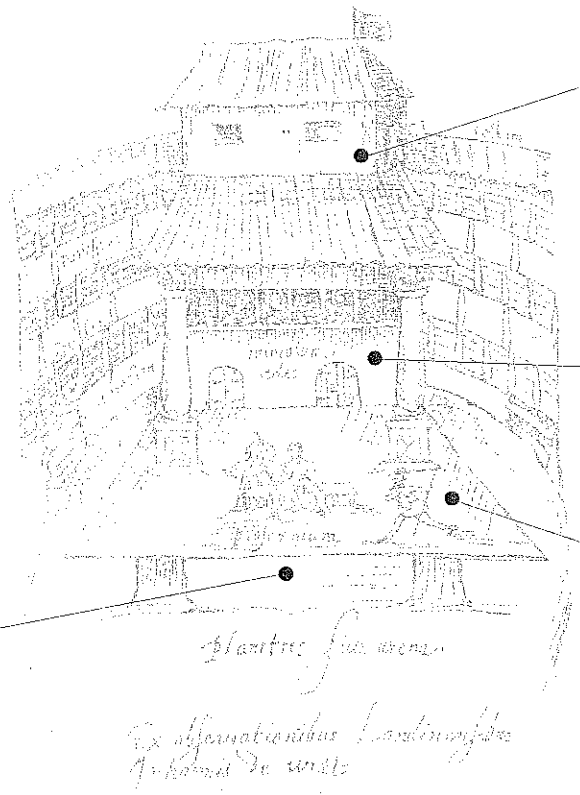
The Renaissance brought to England a heightened interest in drama—at first in the universities, then in the royal court, and finally among the public at large. Although small private stage productions might be held indoors, in schools, royal palaces, and noblemen's homes, public performances demanded more space and access.

Most of the earliest public performances were held in the courtyards of inns, with the spectators watching from the surrounding balconies. The permanent public theater was designed to resemble one of these courtyards. Built by James Burbage, it opened in 1576 in the London suburb of Shoreditch and was called simply the Theatre. Later two other theaters, the Rose and the Swan, opened in the Bankside area of Southwark, just south of central London. This location proved popular, and in 1599, the original Theatre was torn down and rebuilt in the Bankside area as the Globe. By 1600, London had more playhouses than any other European capital.

Because the Globe—which Shakespeare referred to as "this Wooden O" in *Henry V*—was home to the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the acting company with which Shakespeare was affiliated, it is the best known of the Elizabethan public theaters.

Elizabethan Staging

Since Elizabethan public theaters had no artificial lighting or heating, performances in them had to be given in daylight and in warm weather. Private theaters, with artificial light and heat, soon began to open, attracting a higher class of patrons. The first of these was the Blackfriars, built in 1596. Twelve years later Shakespeare's company, by then known as the King's Men, leased the Blackfriars in order to extend their performing season into the winter months.



Above the back of the stage and its small balcony was a painted ceiling called the heavens. It contained trapdoors for the appearance of angels and spirits from the enclosed tower.

The enclosed tower behind the stage could be used for sound effects, such as thunder, drums, and cannon fire.

Props, such as swords and flags, and elaborate costumes added to the display.

Though scenery was minimal, Elizabethan audiences still demanded a good show. A trap door in the stage led to a space below, from which ghosts or spirits could emerge.

A 17th century drawing of the Globe Theater in its London neighborhood

"THIS WOODEN O" The Globe Theatre was a three-story wooden structure that could hold as many as 3,000 people. Plays were performed in the open air on a platform stage that jutted out into a roofless courtyard in the theater's center, where the poorer patrons, or "groundlings," stood to watch the performance. Except for the part directly behind the stage, the theater building consisted of covered galleries where wealthier patrons sat, protected from the elements.

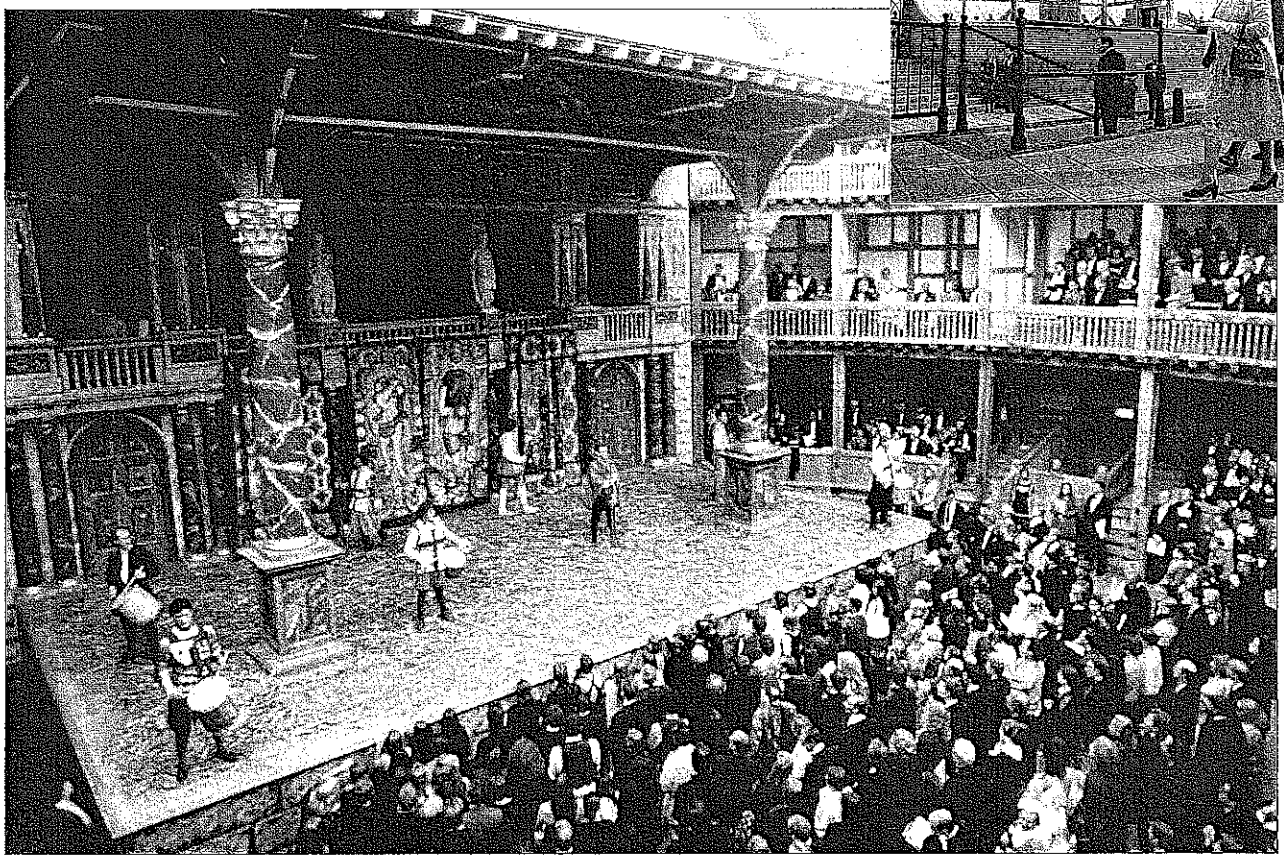
ELIZABETHAN ACTORS It wasn't easy being an actor in Shakespeare's time. Besides having to memorize their lines, actors had to be able to sing and dance, wrestle and fence, clown and weep. They also had to be able to convey subtle messages with simple gestures or minor changes in voice. Because the stage had no front curtain, the actors always walked on and off the stage in full view of the audience. Plays had to be written so that any character who died on stage could be unobtrusively hauled off.

Actors worked in close proximity to the audience, who either stood around the stage, eating and drinking, or watched from the galleries. If audience members disapproved of certain characters or lines, they would let the actors know by jeering or throwing food. The large crowds also attracted pickpockets and other ruffians. The rowdiness of the audiences caused many towns to label actors as vagrants, lumping them together with rogues, vagabonds, and other undesirables.

Because of the scandalous nature of the Elizabethan theater, women were not allowed to perform. All the actors were male, with young boys usually playing the female roles, from aging matrons to young lovers. Shakespeare himself was an actor as well as a playwright, although it was in the latter capacity that he won fame. The leading tragic actor in Shakespeare's company was Richard Burbage, the son of the man who had built London's first theater.

THE FATE OF THE GLOBE In 1613, the Globe's roof caught fire during a performance of *Henry VIII,* and the theater was destroyed. It was quickly rebuilt at the same location, however this time with a tiled gallery roof. Only 30 years later, Oliver Cromwell and the Puritans suppressed what they considered a frivolous form of entertainment by closing the theater's doors. The Globe was torn down in 1644 and replaced with tenement housing. A lively period in London's history had come to a close.

The Rebirth of the Globe



One of the first performances in the newly restored Globe Theater; *inset:* Queen Elizabeth II views the exterior of the new Globe Theater, 1997.

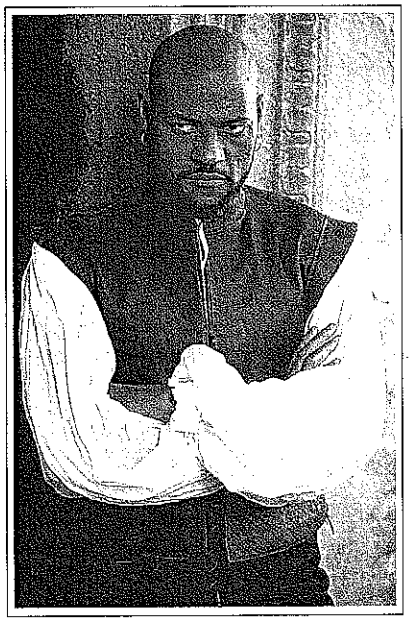
After more than 300 years, a new Globe Theatre now stands only 200 yards from the original site. A pet project of the American actor Sam Wanamaker and a product of much historical and archaeological research, it opened in June 1997 with a performance of *Henry V.* The new Globe features three levels of wooden benches surrounding an open yard and a platform stage. It seats 1,500 theatergoers—substantially fewer than the 3,000 that the original theater held—because today's audiences prefer not to be crowded as close together as Elizabethan audiences were.

As in its Elizabethan namesake, no formal sets, microphones, or spotlights are used in productions at today's Globe. And another Elizabethan tradition continues: contemporary audiences often mimic their 16th-century predecessors by voicing their reactions, sometimes quite loudly and energetically, to events on the stage.

Shakespearean Tragedy

Renaissance Drama

During the Middle Ages, English drama focused mainly on religious themes, teaching moral lessons or retelling Bible stories to a populace that by and large could not read. With the Renaissance, however, came a rebirth of interest in the dramas of ancient Greece and Rome. First at England's universities and then among graduates of those universities, plays imitating classical models became increasingly popular. These plays fell into two main categories: **comedies** and **tragedies.**



Laurence Fishburne as Othello in the 1995 film directed by Oliver Parker

In Renaissance England, comedy was broadly defined as a dramatic work with a happy ending; many comedies contained humor, but humor was not required. A tragedy, in contrast, was a work in which the main character, or tragic hero, came to an unhappy end. In addition to comedies and tragedies, Shakespeare wrote several plays classified as histories—these present stories about England's earlier monarchs. Of all Shakespeare's plays, however, his tragedies are the ones most often cited as his greatest.

The Greek Origins of Tragedy

In the Western tradition, both comedies and tragedies arose in ancient Greece, where they were performed as part of elaborate outdoor festivals. According to the definition of the famous ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle, tragedy arouses pity and fear in the audience—pity for the hero and fear for all human beings, who are subject to character flaws and an unknown destiny. Seeing a tragedy unfold produces a catharsis, or cleansing, of these emotions, for by the end the audience is watching in awe as the hero faces defeat with great courage and dignity.

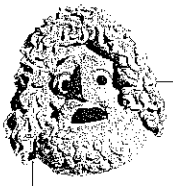
In ancient Greek tragedies, the heroes' tragic flaw was often hubris—an excessive pride that led a tragic hero to challenge the gods. Angered by such hubris, the gods unleashed their retribution, or nemesis, on the hero. Ancient Greek tragedies also made use of a chorus, a group of performers who stood outside the action and commented on the events and characters in a play, often hinting at the doom to come and stressing the fatalistic aspect of the hero's downfall. By Shakespeare's day, the chorus consisted of only one person—a kind of narrator—or was dispensed with entirely.

Characteristics of Tragedy

Shakespearean tragedy differs somewhat from classic Greek tragedy in that Shakespeare's works are not unrelentingly serious. For example, he often eased the intensity of the action by using the device of **comic relief**—the following of a serious scene with a lighter, mildly humorous one. Nevertheless, the following general characteristics are shared by Shakespearean tragedy and classic Greek tragedy:

- The main character, called the **tragic hero,** comes to an unhappy or miserable end.
- The tragic hero is generally a person of importance in society, such as a king or a queen.
- The tragic hero exhibits extraordinary abilities but also a **tragic flaw,** a fatal error in judgment or weakness of character, that leads directly to his or her downfall.

- Outside forces may also contribute to the hero's downfall. If so, the person or force with whom the hero battles is called the **antagonist.**
- A series of causally related events lead inevitably to the **catastrophe,** or tragic resolution. This final stage of the plot usually involves the death of the hero, but other characters may also be affected.
- The tragic hero usually recognizes his or her tragic flaw by the end and so gains the audience's sympathy.
- The tragic hero meets his or her doom with courage and dignity, reaffirming the grandeur of the human spirit.



Shakespeare on the Big Screen

Leonardo DiCaprio and Clare Danes as Romeo and Juliet, 1997

Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare's first great tragedy, is a tale of teenaged lovers from two feuding families in medieval Verona, Italy. A 1997 film version featured Leonardo Di Caprio and Clare Danes.

Julius Caesar focuses on Roman emperor Brutus, a close friend of Julius Caesar's who reluctantly joins the plot to assassinate him. Marlon Brando played Mark Anthony in the 1953 version.

Hamlet tells the story of a prince of Denmark whose procrastination leads to disaster. Kenneth Branagh directed and starred in the 1996 epic film that uses all of Shakespeare's original script.

Othello focuses on a North African soldier whose great flaw "is the green-eyed monster," jealousy. In 1995, Laurence Fishburne appeared in the title role.

King Lear tells of an aged monarch who fails to distinguish honesty from flattery. *A Thousand Acres,* an update of the King Lear story, became a film in 1997.

Macbeth, which appears in this book (see page 323), is a powerful drama of ambition and murder. Several images appearing throughout the selection are from Orson Welles's 1948 version and Roman Polanski's 1971 version.

YOUR TURN Why do you think that so many of Shakespeare's plays have been adapted to film?

Strategies for Reading: Shakespearean Tragedy

1. Trace the plot's main events, especially the causes and effects that lead to the catastrophe. Watch for the first event that sets the series in motion. At what point is there no turning back?
2. Sort out the antagonists in the play. Who is against whom, and what are the conflicts?
3. Identify the tragic hero. Make sure that you can justify your choice with reasons.
4. Determine the hero's admirable character traits as well as his or her tragic flaw.
5. Analyze how the tragic hero faces destiny. Does he or she show courage and dignity in defeat?
6. **Monitor** your reading strategies and modify them when your understanding breaks down. Remember to use your Strategies for Active Reading: **predict, visualize, connect, question, clarify,** and **evaluate.**

The Tragedy of Macbeth

Verse drama by WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Connect to Your Life

Ambitious Goals Lazy people are often blamed for having too little ambition. At the same time, many overachievers are criticized for excessive single-mindedness or for doing the wrong things to achieve their goals. Think about your own ambitions and the people you would describe as ambitious. When is ambition good? When is it undesirable or even evil? Share your ideas in a class discussion.

Build Background

A Scottish Clan Ambition is a driving force in *Macbeth.* The title character is based to some extent on a historical Macbeth, a king of 11th-century Scotland who seized the monarchy after killing his predecessor, Duncan I. The play was written to please King James I, who had been the King of Scotland (as James VI) before the death of his cousin Elizabeth in 1603 brought him to the English throne. King James became the patron, or chief sponsor, of Shakespeare's acting company, thereafter known as the King's Men. *The Tragedy of Macbeth* was probably first performed in the summer of 1606, with James I and the visiting king of Denmark in attendance.

Shakespeare's desire to please King James may account for the prominence of witchcraft in *Macbeth.* The new king was quite interested in the subject, having himself written a book on witchcraft, called *Demonology,* which was published in 1597. Belief in witchcraft was widespread in Shakespeare's day, particularly among less educated people. Members of the nobility, whether or not they truly believed in witches, at times used accusations of witchcraft as a way to get rid of political enemies.

Focus Your Reading: Literary Analysis

LITERARY ANALYSIS SOLILOQUY/ASIDE Authors of plays rely on certain conventions to give the audience more information about the characters. Two such conventions are the soliloquy and the aside.

- A **soliloquy** is a speech that a character makes while alone on stage, to reveal his or her thoughts to the audience.
- An **aside** is a remark that a character makes in an undertone to the audience or another character but that others on stage are not supposed to hear. A stage direction clarifies that a remark is an aside; unless otherwise specified, the aside is to the audience. Here is an example:

  Macbeth. [*Aside*] Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor!
  The greatest is behind.—[*To* Ross *and* Angus] Thanks for your pains.
  [*Aside to* Banquo] Do you not hope your children shall be kings . . . ?

LITERARY ANALYSIS BLANK VERSE Like most plays written before the 20th century, *Macbeth* is a **verse drama,** a play in which the dialogue consists almost entirely of poetry with a fixed pattern of rhythm, or **meter.** Many English verse dramas are written in blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter, a meter in which the normal line contains five stressed syllables, each preceded by an unstressed syllable:

So fóul and fáir a dáy I háve not séen.

Blank verse has been a popular medium for drama because it easily accommodates the rhythms of spoken English.

LITERARY ANALYSIS DRAMATIC IRONY **Irony** is based on a contrast between appearance or expectation and reality. In **dramatic irony,** what appears true to one or more characters in a play is seen to be false to the audience. The audience has a more complete picture of the action, because it knows more details. In Act One of *Macbeth,* dramatic irony can be found in Duncan's words to Lady Macbeth upon his arrival at the Macbeths' castle.

Conduct me to mine host. We love him highly
And shall continue our graces toward him.

Duncan is sure of Macbeth's loyalty and says that he will continue to honor Macbeth with marks of his favor. However, the audience knows that Macbeth is planning to murder Duncan to increase his own power. The audience recognizes the irony of Duncan's trusting remarks.

LITERARY ANALYSIS FORESHADOWING **Foreshadowing** is a writer's use of hints or clues to suggest what events will occur later in a work. The witches' prophesies are the most explicit hints of what is going to happen in the play. As you read *Macbeth,* list examples of foreshadowing and the events you think they hint at.

Act, Scene, Lines	What the Lines Hint At
Act Two, Scene 1, lines 62–64	Macbeth will murder Duncan.

LITERARY ANALYSIS THEME A **theme** is a central idea conveyed by a work of literature. Not to be confused with the work's subject (what it is about in a literal sense), a theme is a general perception about life or human nature. Longer works like *Macbeth* usually contain several themes. As you read the play, take notes about what it has to say about the following topics:

- ambition
- impulses and desires
- marriage
- fate and our efforts to control it
- appearance versus reality
- loyalty
- the supernatural
- reason and mental stability

Focus Your Reading: Active Reading Skills

Using Your READER'S NOTEBOOK
As you read *Macbeth,* record any of your questions or comments about Shakespeare's use of dramatic conventions or language. For specific suggestions, refer to the Active Reading strategies that follow.

ACTIVE READING READING DRAMA The printed text of Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* like that of any drama, consists mainly of **dialogue** spoken by the characters (with labels that show who is speaking) and **stage directions** that specify settings (times and places) and tell how characters behave and speak. The play is divided into **acts,** which are themselves divided into **scenes.** The beginning of a new scene usually involves a change in setting.

Strategies for Reading *Macbeth*

1. Read the opening list of characters—the dramatis personae—to familiarize yourself with the characters.
2. Study the plot summary and stage directions at the beginning of each scene. Try to develop a mental picture of the setting of the scene's action.
3. Pay attention to the labels that show who is speaking and to stage directions that indicate to whom the characters are speaking. Try to envision what each character might look and sound like if you were seeing the play performed on a stage.
4. To get a better sense of what the dialogue might sound like, try reading some of it aloud.

ACTIVE READING SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE
Though Shakespeare wrote in modern English, the language of his time was quite different from today's English. Here are some major differences:

- **Grammatical forms:** In Shakespeare's day, people still commonly used the pronouns *thou, thee, thy, thine,* and *thyself* in place of forms of *you.* Verb forms that are now outdated were also in use—*art* for *are* and *cometh* for *comes,* for example.
- **Grammatical structures:** Helping verbs were used far less than they are today. For example, instead of saying "Don't you know he has?" Lady Macbeth says "Know you not he has?"
- **Unusual word order:** Shakespeare often puts verbs before subjects, objects before verbs, and other sentence parts in positions that now seem unusual. For instance, Lady Macbeth says "O, never shall the sun that morrow see!" instead of "O, the sun shall never see that morrow!"
- **Unfamiliar vocabulary:** Shakespeare's vocabulary included many words no longer in use (like *seeling* meaning "blinding") or with meanings different from their meanings today (like *choppy* meaning "chapped"). Shakespeare also coined new words, some of which (like *assassination*) have become a permanent part of the language. The Guide for Reading notes accompanying the play will clarify the meanings of many of the unfamiliar words.

Strategies for Reading Shakespeare's Language

As you read *Macbeth,* you may find it helpful to go through the scenes several times to improve your understanding of the language.

1. Skim each scene quickly to get a general sense of what is going on.
2. Study the Guide for Reading notes for help with the unfamiliar vocabulary and phrasing.
3. Go through the scene again, paraphrasing the lines in your head to clarify their meaning.
4. Read through the scene—or at least the important speeches—one more time, focusing on the figurative language and sensory images (imagery that appeals to the five senses) and the clues they contain about the characters and themes.
5. Focus on the wording of the dialogue, especially asides or soliloquies, to make inferences about the characters' feelings, attitudes, thoughts, and motives.

Orson Welles as Macbeth
(film, directed by Orson Welles, 1948)

Macbeth

William Shakespeare

CHARACTERS

Duncan, king of Scotland

His sons
- **Malcolm**
- **Donalbain**

Noblemen of Scotland
- **Macbeth**
- **Banquo**
- **Macduff**
- **Lennox**
- **Ross**
- **Menteith** (mĕn-tēth′)
- **Angus**
- **Caithness** (kāth′nĭs)

Fleance (flā′ens), son to Banquo

Siward (syōō′ərd), earl of Northumberland, general of the English forces

Young Siward, his son

Seyton (sā′tən), an officer attending on Macbeth

Son, to Macduff

An English Doctor

A Scottish Doctor

A Porter

An Old Man

Three Murderers

Lady Macbeth

Lady Macduff

A Gentlewoman attending on Lady Macbeth

Hecate (hĕk′ĭt), goddess of witchcraft

Three Witches

Apparitions

Lords, Officers, Soldiers, Messengers, and Attendants

THE TIME: THE ELEVENTH CENTURY
THE PLACE: SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND

Act 1

SCENE 1

An open place in Scotland.

The play opens in a wild and lonely place in medieval Scotland. Three witches enter and speak of what they know will happen this day: The civil war will end, and they will meet Macbeth, one of the generals. Their meeting ends when their demon companions, in the form of a toad and a cat, call them away.

[*Thunder and lightning. Enter three* Witches.]

First Witch. When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Second Witch. When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

Third Witch. That will be ere the set of sun.

First Witch. Where the place?

Second Witch. Upon the heath.

Third Witch. There to meet with Macbeth.

First Witch. I come, Graymalkin!

Second Witch. Paddock calls.

Third Witch. Anon!

All. Fair is foul, and foul is fair.
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

[*Exeunt.*]

3 hurlyburly: turmoil; uproar.

8–9 Graymalkin . . . Paddock: two demon helpers in the form of a cat and a toad; **anon:** at once.

10 Fair . . . fair: The witches delight in the confusion of good and bad, beauty and ugliness.

[Stage Direction] ***Exeunt*** *Latin:* They leave (the stage).

Opening scene, *Macbeth* (1971), directed by Roman Polanski.

SCENE 2

King Duncan's camp near the battlefield.

Duncan, the king of Scotland, waits in his camp for news of the battle. He learns that one of his generals, Macbeth, has been victorious in several battles. Not only has Macbeth defeated the rebellious Macdonwald, but he has also conquered the armies of the king of Norway and the Scottish traitor, the thane of Cawdor. Duncan orders the thane of Cawdor's execution and announces that Macbeth will receive the traitor's title.

[*Alarum within. Enter* Duncan, Malcolm, Donalbain, Lennox, *with* Attendants, *meeting a bleeding* Captain.]

[Stage Direction] **alarum within:** the sound of a trumpet offstage, a signal that soldiers should arm themselves.

Duncan. What bloody man is that? He can report,
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt
The newest state.

Malcolm. This is the sergeant
Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
'Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!
Say to the King the knowledge of the broil
As thou didst leave it.

5 'gainst my captivity: to save me from capture.
6 broil: battle.

Captain. Doubtful it stood,
As two spent swimmers that do cling together
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonwald
(Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
The multiplying villainies of nature
Do swarm upon him) from the Western Isles
Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied;
And Fortune, on his damned quarrel smiling,
Showed like a rebel's whore. But all's too weak;
For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandished steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution
(Like valor's minion), carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave;
Which ne'er shook hands nor bade farewell to him
Till he unseamed him from the nave to the chops
And fixed his head upon our battlements.

7–9 Doubtful . . . art: The two armies are compared to two exhausted swimmers who cling to each other and thus cannot swim.

9–13 The officer hates Macdonwald, whose evils **(multiplying villainies)** swarm like insects around him. His army consists of soldiers **(kerns and gallowglasses)** from the Hebrides **(Western Isles).**

19 valor's minion: the favorite of valor, meaning the bravest of all.

22 unseamed him . . . chops: split him open from the navel to the jaw. What does this act suggest about Macbeth?

Duncan. O valiant cousin! worthy gentleman!

Captain. As whence the sun 'gins his reflection
Shipwracking storms and direful thunders break,
So from that spring whence comfort seemed to come
Discomfort swells. Mark, King of Scotland, mark.
No sooner justice had, with valor armed,
Compelled these skipping kerns to trust their heels

25–28 As whence . . . discomfort swells: As the rising sun is sometimes followed by storms, a new assault on Macbeth began.

But the Norweyan lord, surveying vantage,
With furbished arms and new supplies of men,
Began a fresh assault.

Duncan. Dismayed not this
Our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?

Captain. Yes,
As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion.
If I say sooth, I must report they were
As cannons overcharged with double cracks, so they
Doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe.
Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds,
Or memorize another Golgotha,
I cannot tell—
But I am faint; my gashes cry for help.

Duncan. So well thy words become thee as thy wounds
They smack of honor both. Go get him surgeons.

[*Exit* Captain, *attended.*]

[*Enter* Ross *and* Angus.]

Who comes here?

Malcolm. The worthy Thane of Ross.

Lennox. What a haste looks through his eyes! So
should he look
That seems to speak things strange.

Ross. God save the King!

Duncan. Whence cam'st thou, worthy thane?

Ross. From Fife, great King,
Where the Norweyan banners flout the sky
And fan our people cold. Norway himself,
With terrible numbers,
Assisted by that most disloyal traitor
The Thane of Cawdor, began a dismal conflict,
Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapped in proof,
Confronted him with self-comparisons,
Point against point, rebellious arm 'gainst arm,
Curbing his lavish spirit; and to conclude,
The victory fell on us.

Duncan. Great happiness!

Ross. That now
Sweno, the Norways' king, craves composition;
Nor would we deign him burial of his men
Till he disbursed, at Saint Colme's Inch,
Ten thousand dollars to our general use.

Duncan. No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive

31–33 the Norweyan . . . assault: The king of Norway took an opportunity to attack.

36 sooth: the truth.

37 double cracks: a double load of ammunition.

39–40 Except . . . memorize another Golgotha: The officer's admiration leads to exaggeration. He claims he cannot decide whether (**except**) Macbeth and Banquo wanted to bathe in blood or make the battlefield as famous as Golgotha, the site of Christ's crucifixion.

45 Thane: a Scottish noble, similar in rank to an English earl.

48–58 Ross has arrived from Fife, where Norway's troops had invaded and frightened the people. There the king of Norway, along with the thane of Cawdor, met Macbeth (described as the husband of **Bellona,** the goddess of war). Macbeth, in heavy armor (**proof**), challenged the enemy, and achieved victory.

59 craves composition: wants a treaty.

60 deign: allow.

61 disbursed, at Saint Colme's Inch: paid at Saint Colme's Inch, an island in the North Sea.

Our bosom interest. Go pronounce his present death
And with his former title greet Macbeth.

Ross. I'll see it done.

Duncan. What he hath lost noble Macbeth hath won.

[*Exeunt.*]

63–64 deceive our bosom interest: betray our friendship; **present death:** immediate execution.

65 What reward has the king decided to give to Macbeth?

SCENE 3

A bleak place near the battlefield.

While leaving the battlefield, Macbeth and Banquo meet the witches, who are gleefully discussing the trouble they have caused. The witches hail Macbeth by a title he already holds, thane of Glamis. Then they prophesy that he will become both thane of Cawdor and king. When Banquo asks about his future, they speak in riddles, saying that he will be the father of kings but not a king himself.

After the witches vanish, Ross and Angus arrive to announce that Macbeth has been named thane of Cawdor. The first part of the witches' prophecy has come true, and Macbeth is stunned. He immediately begins to consider the possibility of murdering King Duncan to fulfill the rest of the witches' prophecy to him. Shaken, he turns his thoughts away from this "horrid image."

[*Thunder. Enter the three* Witches.]

First Witch. Where hast thou been, sister?

Second Witch. Killing swine.

Third Witch. Sister, where thou?

First Witch. A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap
And mounched and mounched and mounched. "Give me," quoth I.
"Aroint thee, witch!" the rump-fed ronyon cries.
Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the "Tiger";
But in a sieve I'll thither sail
And, like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.

Second Witch. I'll give thee a wind.

First Witch. Th' art kind.

Third Witch. And I another.

First Witch. I myself have all the other,
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I' the shipman's card.

2 Killing swine: Witches were often accused of killing people's pigs.

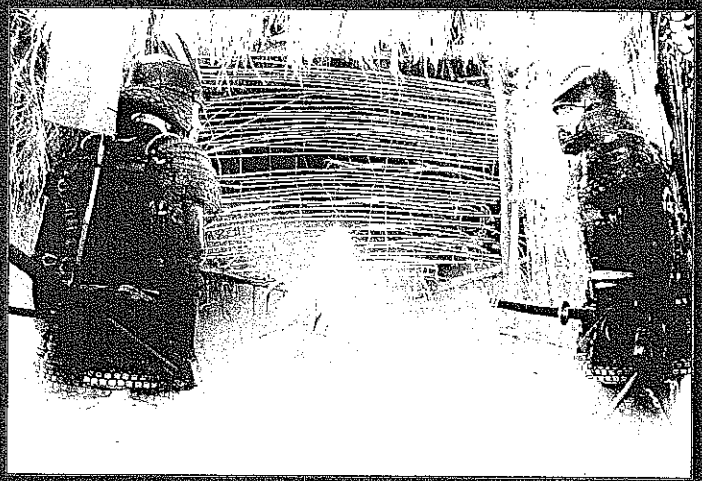
5 mounched: munched.

6 "Aroint thee, witch!" . . . ronyon cries: "Go away, witch!" the fat-bottomed (**rump-fed**), ugly creature (**ronyon**) cries.

7–8 The woman's husband, the master of a merchant ship (**the "Tiger"**), has sailed to Aleppo, a famous trading center in the Middle East. The witch will pursue him. Witches, who could change shape at will, were thought to sail on strainers (**sieve**).

View and Compare

In what ways do each of these images convey the eerie nature of the witches' scene?



Act 1, Scene 3: Macbeth and Banquo meet one of the witches, *The Throne of Blood* (film, directed by Akira Kurosawa, Japan, 1957)

Act 1, Scene 3: Banquo and the Witches (film, 1961)

I'll drain him dry as hay.
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his penthouse lid.
He shall live a man forbid.
Weary sev'nights, nine times nine,
Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine.
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost.
Look what I have.

Second Witch. Show me! Show me!

First Witch. Here I have a pilot's thumb,
Wracked as homeward he did come.

[*Drum within.*]

Third Witch. A drum, a drum!
Macbeth doth come.

All. The Weird Sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about,
Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! The charm's wound up.

[*Enter* Macbeth *and* Banquo.]

Macbeth. So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

Banquo. How far is't called to Forres? What are these,
So withered, and so wild in their attire,
That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,
And yet are on't? Live you? or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.

Macbeth. Speak, if you can. What are you?

First Witch. All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

Second Witch. All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

Third Witch. All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!

Banquo. Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair? I' the name of truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
You greet with present grace and great prediction

14–23 The witch is going to torture the woman's husband. She controls where the winds blow, covering all points of a compass (**shipman's card**). She will make him sleepless, keeping his eyelids (**penthouse lid**) from closing. Thus, he will lead an accursed (**forbid**) life for weeks (**sev'nights**), wasting away with fatigue.

33 posters: quick riders.

36 Nine was considered a magical number by superstitious people.

42–46 aught: anything; **choppy:** chapped; **your beards:** Beards on women identified them as witches. Banquo vividly describes the witches. What does he notice about them?

48–50 What is surprising about the three titles the witches use to greet Macbeth?

53 Are ye fantastical: Are you (the witches) imaginary?

Of noble having and of royal hope,
That he seems rapt withal. To me you speak not.
If you can look into the seeds of time
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favors nor your hate.

First Witch. Hail!

Second Witch. Hail!

Third Witch. Hail!

First Witch. Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

Second Witch. Not so happy, yet much happier.

Third Witch. Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.
So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

First Witch. Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

Macbeth. Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more!
By Sinel's death I know I am Thane of Glamis,
But how of Cawdor? The Thane of Cawdor lives,
A prosperous gentleman; and to be King
Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence
You owe this strange intelligence, or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
With such prophetic greeting. Speak, I charge you.

[Witches *vanish*.]

Banquo. The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither are they vanished?

Macbeth. Into the air, and what seemed corporal melted
As breath into the wind. Would they had stayed!

Banquo. Were such things here as we do speak about?
Or have we eaten on the insane root
That takes the reason prisoner?

Macbeth. Your children shall be kings.

Banquo. You shall be King.

Macbeth. And Thane of Cawdor too. Went it not so?

Banquo. To the selfsame tune and words. Who's here?

[*Enter* Ross *and* Angus.]

Ross. The King hath happily received, Macbeth,
The news of thy success; and when he reads
Thy personal venture in the rebels' fight,
His wonders and his praises do contend

54–57 My noble partner . . . . rapt withal: The witches' prophecies of noble possessions (**having**)—the lands and wealth of Cawdor—and kingship (**royal hope**) have left Macbeth dazed (**rapt withal**). Look for evidence that shows what Macbeth thinks of the prophecies.

65–68 The witches speak in riddles. Though Banquo will be less fortunate (**happy**) than Macbeth, he will be father to (**get**) future kings. What do the witches predict for Banquo? What do you think their predictions mean?

75–76 whence: where. Macbeth wants to know where the witches received their knowledge (**strange intelligence**).

80 whither: where.

81 corporal: physical; real.

84 insane root: A number of plants were believed to cause insanity when eaten.

92–93 His wonders . . . Silenced with that: King Duncan hesitates between awe (**wonders**) and gratitude (**praise**) and is, as a result, speechless.

Which should be thine or his. Silenced with that,
In viewing o'er the rest o' the selfsame day,
He finds thee in the stout Norweyan ranks,
Nothing afeard of what thyself didst make,
Strange images of death. As thick as hail
Came post with post, and every one did bear
Thy praises in his kingdom's great defense
And poured them down before him.

Angus. We are sent
To give thee from our royal master thanks;
Only to herald thee into his sight,
Not pay thee.

Ross. And for an earnest of a greater honor,
He bade me, from him, call thee Thane of Cawdor;
In which addition, hail, most worthy Thane!
For it is thine.

Banquo. What, can the devil speak true?

Macbeth. The Thane of Cawdor lives. Why do you dress me
In borrowed robes?

Angus. Who was the Thane lives yet,
But under heavy judgment bears that life
Which he deserves to lose. Whether he was combined
With those of Norway, or did line the rebel
With hidden help and vantage, or that with both
He labored in his country's wrack, I know not;
But treasons capital, confessed and proved,
Have overthrown him.

Macbeth. [*Aside*] Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor!
The greatest is behind.—[*To* Ross *and* Angus] Thanks for your pains.
[*Aside to* Banquo] Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them?

Banquo. [*Aside to* Macbeth] That, trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange!
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.—
Cousins, a word, I pray you.

96–97 nothing afeard . . . of death: Although Macbeth left many dead (**strange images of death**), he obviously did not fear death himself.

104 earnest: partial payment.

106 addition: title.

111–116 Whether he was . . . overthrown him: The former thane of Cawdor may have been secretly allied (**combined**) with the king of Norway, or he may have supported the traitor Macdonwald (**did line the rebel**). But he is guilty of treasons that deserve the death penalty (**treasons capital**), having aimed at the country's ruin (**wrack**).

116 aside: a stage direction that means Macbeth is speaking to himself, beyond hearing.

120 home: fully; completely.

121 enkindle you unto: inflame your ambitions.

123–126 to win us . . . consequence: Banquo warns that evil powers often offer little truths to tempt people. The witches may be lying about what matters most (**in deepest consequence**).

Macbeth. [*Aside*] Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.—I thank you, gentlemen.—
[*Aside*] This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smothered in surmise and nothing is
But what is not.

Banquo. Look how our partner's rapt.

Macbeth. [*Aside*] If chance will have me King, why chance may crown me,
Without my stir.

144 my stir: my doing anything.

Banquo. New honors come upon him,
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mold
But with the aid of use.

Macbeth. [*Aside*] Come what come may,
Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.

146–147 Come what . . . roughest day: The future will arrive no matter what.

Banquo. Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure.

148 stay: wait.

Macbeth. Give me your favor. My dull brain was wrought
With things forgotten. Kind gentlemen, your pains
Are registered where every day I turn
The leaf to read them. Let us toward the King.
[*Aside to* Banquo] Think upon what hath chanced, and, at more time,
The interim having weighed it, let us speak
Our free hearts each to other.

150–152 your pains . . . read them: I will always remember your efforts. The metaphor refers to keeping a diary and reading it regularly.

153–155 at more time . . . other: Macbeth wants to discuss the prophecies later, after he and Banquo have had time to think about them.

Banquo. [*Aside to* Macbeth] Very gladly.

Macbeth. [*Aside to* Banquo] Till then, enough.—Come, friends.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE 4

A room in the king's palace at Forres.

King Duncan receives news of the execution of the former thane of Cawdor. As the king is admitting his bad judgment concerning the traitor, Macbeth enters with Banquo, Ross, and Angus. Duncan expresses his gratitude to them and then, in a most unusual action, officially names his own son Malcolm as heir to the throne. To honor Macbeth, Duncan decides to visit Macbeth's castle at Inverness. Macbeth, his thoughts full of dark ambition, leaves to prepare for the king's visit.

[*Flourish. Enter* Duncan, Lennox, Malcolm, Donalbain, *and* Attendants.]

Duncan. Is execution done on Cawdor? Are not
Those in commission yet returned?

Malcolm. My liege,
They are not yet come back. But I have spoke
With one that saw him die; who did report
That very frankly he confessed his treasons,
Implored your Highness' pardon, and set forth
A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving it. He died
As one that had been studied in his death
To throw away the dearest thing he owed
As 'twere a careless trifle.

Duncan. There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.

[*Enter* Macbeth, Banquo, Ross, *and* Angus.]

O worthiest cousin,
The sin of my ingratitude even now
Was heavy on me! Thou art so far before
That swiftest wing of recompense is slow
To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,
That the proportion both of thanks and payment
Might have been mine! Only I have left to say,
More is thy due than more than all can pay.

Macbeth. The service and the loyalty I owe,
In doing it pays itself. Your Highness' part
Is to receive our duties; and our duties

2 those in commission: those who have the responsibility for Cawdor's execution.

6 set forth: showed.

8–11 He died as . . . trifle: He died as if he had rehearsed **(studied)** the moment. Though losing his life **(the dearest thing he owed)**, he behaved with calm dignity.

14–21 O worthiest . . . pay: The king feels that he cannot repay **(recompense)** Macbeth enough. Macbeth's qualities and accomplishments are of greater value than any thanks or payment Duncan can give.

Are to your throne and state children and servants,
Which do but what they should by doing everything
Safe toward your love and honor.

Duncan. Welcome hither.
I have begun to plant thee and will labor
To make thee full of growing. Noble Banquo,
That hast no less deserved, nor must be known
No less to have done so, let me infold thee
And hold thee to my heart.

Banquo. There if I grow,
The harvest is your own.

Duncan. My plenteous joys,
Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves
In drops of sorrow. Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland; which honor must
Not unaccompanied invest him only,
But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
On all deservers. From hence to Inverness,
And bind us further to you.

Macbeth. The rest is labor, which is not used for you.
I'll be myself the harbinger, and make joyful
The hearing of my wife with your approach;
So, humbly take my leave.

Duncan. My worthy Cawdor!

Macbeth. [*Aside*] The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires!
Let not light see my black and deep desires.
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be,
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see. [*Exit.*]

Duncan. True, worthy Banquo: he is full so valiant,
And in his commendations I am fed;
It is a banquet to me. Let's after him,
Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome.
It is a peerless kinsman.

[*Flourish. Exeunt.*]

28–29 I have . . . growing: The king plans to give more honors to Macbeth. What might Macbeth be thinking now?

33–35 My plenteous . . . sorrow: The king is crying tears of joy.

39 Prince of Cumberland: the title given to the heir to the Scottish throne. Now that Malcolm is heir, how might Macbeth react?

42 Inverness: site of Macbeth's castle, where the king has just invited himself, giving another honor to Macbeth.

45 harbinger: a representative sent before a royal party to make proper arrangements for its arrival.

52–53 The eye . . . to see: Macbeth hopes for the king's murder, although he does not want to see it.

SCENE 5

Macbeth's castle at Inverness.

Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband that tells her of the witches' prophecies, one of which has already come true. She is determined that Macbeth will be king. However, she fears that he lacks the courage to kill Duncan. After a messenger tells her the king is coming, she calls on the powers of evil to help her do what must be done. When Macbeth arrives, she tells him that the king must die that night but reminds him that he must appear to be a good and loyal host.

[*Enter* Lady Macbeth *alone, with a letter.*]

Lady Macbeth. [*Reads*] "They met me in the day of success; and I have learned by the perfect'st report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the King, who all-hailed me Thane of Cawdor, by which title, before, these Weird Sisters saluted me, and referred me to the coming on of time with 'Hail, King that shalt be!' This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell."

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature.
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great;
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'ldst have, great Glamis,
That which cries "Thus thou must do," if thou have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
And chastise with the valor of my tongue
All that impedes thee from the golden round
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crowned withal.

[*Enter* Messenger.]

16–21 Yet do . . . holily: Lady Macbeth fears her husband is too good (**too full o' the milk of human kindness**) to seize the throne by murder (**the nearest way**). Lacking the necessary wickedness (**illness**), he wants to gain power virtuously (**holily**).

What is your tidings?

Messenger. The King comes here tonight.

Lady Macbeth. Thou'rt mad to say it!
Is not thy master with him? who, were't so,
Would have informed for preparation.

Messenger. So please you, it is true. Our Thane is coming.
One of my fellows had the speed of him,
Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more
Than would make up his message.

Lady Macbeth. Give him tending;
He brings great news.

[*Exit* Messenger.]

The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood;
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark
To cry "Hold, hold!"

[*Enter* Macbeth.]

Great Glamis! worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
Thy letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant.

Macbeth. My dearest love,
Duncan comes here tonight.

Lady Macbeth. And when goes hence?

Macbeth. Tomorrow, as he purposes.

Lady Macbeth. O, never
Shall sun that morrow see!
Your face, my Thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,

35 had the speed of him: rode faster than he.

38 raven: The harsh cry of the raven, a bird symbolizing evil and misfortune, was supposed to indicate an approaching death.

40–54 Lady Macbeth calls on the spirits of evil to rid her of feminine weakness (**unsex me**) and to block out guilt. She wants no normal pangs of conscience (**compunctious visitings of nature**) to get in the way of her murderous plan. She asks that her mother's milk be turned to bile (**gall**) by the unseen evil forces (**murd'ring ministers, sightless substances**) that exist in nature. Furthermore, she asks that the night wrap (**pall**) itself in darkness as black as hell so that no one may see or stop the crime. Do you think Lady Macbeth could actually kill Duncan?

Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye,
Your hand, your tongue; look like the innocent flower,
But be the serpent under't. He that's coming
Must be provided for; and you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch,
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

Macbeth. We will speak further.

Lady Macbeth. Only look up clear.
To alter favor ever is to fear.
Leave all the rest to me.

[*Exeunt.*]

63–66 To beguile . . . under't: To fool **(beguile)** everyone, act as expected at such a time, that is, as a good host. Who is more like a serpent, Lady Macbeth or her husband?

68 my dispatch: my management.

70 give solely sovereign sway: bring absolute royal power.

72 To alter . . . fear: To change your expression **(favor)** is a sign of fear.

SCENE 6

In front of Macbeth's castle.

King Duncan and his party arrive, and Lady Macbeth welcomes them. Duncan is generous in his praise of his hosts and eagerly awaits the arrival of Macbeth.

[*Hautboys and torches. Enter* Duncan, Malcolm, Donalbain, Banquo, Lennox, Macduff, Ross, Angus, *and* Attendants.]

[Stage Direction] **hautboys:** oboes.

Duncan. This castle hath a pleasant seat. The air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

1 seat: location.

Banquo. This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
By his loved mansionry that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here. No jutty, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendent bed and procreant cradle.
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed
The air is delicate.

3–10 This guest . . . delicate: The martin **(martlet)** usually built its nest on a church **(temple)**, where every projection **(jutty)**, sculptured decoration **(frieze)**, support **(buttress)**, and convenient corner **(coign of vantage)** offered a good nesting site. Banquo sees the presence of the martin's hanging **(pendent)** nest, a breeding **(procreant)** place, as a sign of healthy air.

[*Enter* Lady Macbeth.]

Duncan. See, see, our honored hostess!
The love that follows us sometime is our trouble,
Which still we thank as love. Herein I teach you
How you shall bid God 'ield us for your pains
And thank us for your trouble.

Lady Macbeth. All our service
In every point twice done, and then done double

Were poor and single business to contend
Against those honors deep and broad wherewith
Your Majesty loads our house. For those of old,
And the late dignities heaped up to them,
We rest your hermits.

Duncan. Where's the Thane of Cawdor?
We coursed him at the heels and had a purpose
To be his purveyor; but he rides well,
And his great love, sharp as his spur, hath holp him
To his home before us. Fair and noble hostess,
We are your guest tonight.

Lady Macbeth. Your servants ever
Have theirs, themselves, and what is theirs, in compt,
To make their audit at your Highness' pleasure,
Still to return your own.

Duncan. Give me your hand;
Conduct me to mine host. We love him highly
And shall continue our graces towards him.
By your leave, hostess.

[*Exeunt.*]

16 single business: weak service. Lady Macbeth claims that nothing she or her husband can do will match Duncan's generosity.

20 we rest your hermits: we can only repay you with prayers. The wealthy used to hire hermits to pray for the dead.

21 coursed him at the heels: followed him closely.

22 purveyor: one who makes advance arrangements for a royal visit.

23 holp: helped.

25–28 Legally, Duncan owned everything in his kingdom. Lady Macbeth politely says that they hold his property in trust (**compt**), ready to return it (**make their audit**) whenever he wants. Why do you think Lady Macbeth is being especially gracious to Duncan?

Act 1, Scene 6: Duncan at Macbeth's castle (film, 1971)

SCENE 7

A room in Macbeth's castle.

Macbeth has left Duncan in the middle of dinner. Alone, he begins to have second thoughts about his murderous plan. Lady Macbeth enters and discovers that he has changed his mind. She scornfully accuses him of cowardice and tells him that a true man would never back out of a commitment. She reassures him of success and explains her plan. She will make sure that the king's attendants drink too much. When they are fast asleep, Macbeth will stab the king with the servants' weapons.

[*Hautboys. Torches. Enter a* Sewer, *and divers* Servants *with dishes and service over the stage. Then enter* Macbeth.]

[Stage Direction] **Sewer:** the steward, the servant in charge of arranging the banquet and tasting the King's food; **divers:** various.

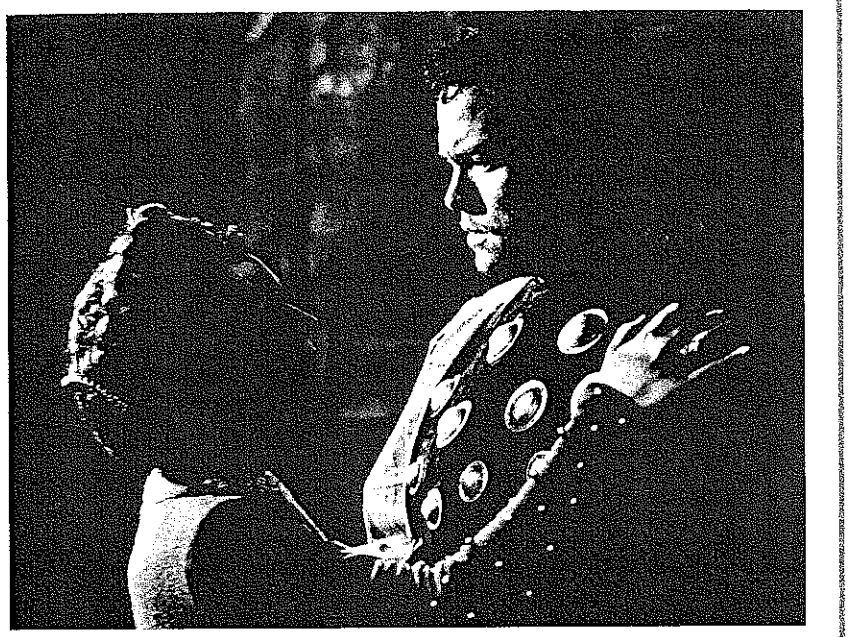
Macbeth. If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch,
With his surcease, success, that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'ld jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here, that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor. This even-handed justice
Commends the ingredience of our poisoned chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin, horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other—

1–10 Again, Macbeth argues with himself about murdering the king. If it could be done without causing problems later, then it would be good to do it soon. If Duncan's murder would have no negative consequences and be successfully completed with his death **(surcease)**, then Macbeth would risk eternal damnation. He knows, however, that terrible deeds **(bloody instructions)** often backfire.

12–28 Macbeth reminds himself that he is Duncan's relative, subject, and host and that the king has never abused his royal powers **(faculties)**. In fact, Duncan is such a good person that there is no possible reason for his murder except Macbeth's own driving ambition.

[*Enter* Lady Macbeth.]

How now? What news?



Act 1, Scene 7: Orson Welles as Macbeth and Jeanette Nolan as Lady Macbeth (film, 1948)

Lady Macbeth. He has almost supped. Why have you left the chamber?

Macbeth. Hath he asked for me?

Lady Macbeth. Know you not he has?

Macbeth. We will proceed no further in this business.
He hath honored me of late, and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

Lady Macbeth. Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valor
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
Like the poor cat i' the adage?

Macbeth. Prithee peace!
I dare do all that may become a man.

32–35 I have . . . so soon: The praises that Macbeth has received are, like new clothes, to be worn, not quickly thrown away. What has Macbeth decided?

35–38 Was the hope drunk . . . freely: Lady Macbeth sarcastically suggests that Macbeth's ambition must have been drunk, because it now seems to have a hangover (**to look so green and pale**).

39–45 Such I . . . adage: Lady Macbeth criticizes Macbeth's weakened resolve to secure the crown (**ornament of life**) and calls him a coward. She compares him to a cat in a proverb (**adage**) who wouldn't catch fish because it feared wet feet.

Who dares do more is none.

Lady Macbeth. What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both.
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

Macbeth. If we should fail?

Lady Macbeth. We fail?
But screw your courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep
(Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him), his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon
The unguarded Duncan? what not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?

Macbeth. Bring forth men-children only,
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males. Will it not be received,
When we have marked with blood those sleepy two
Of his own chamber and used their very daggers,
That they have done't?

Lady Macbeth. Who dares receive it other,
As we shall make our griefs and clamor roar
Upon his death?

Macbeth. I am settled and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show;
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

[*Exeunt.*]

54 I have given suck: I have nursed a baby.

60 but . . . place: When each string of a guitar or lute is tightened to the peg (**sticking place**), the instrument is ready to be played.

65–67 that memory . . . a limbeck only: Memory was thought to be at the base of the brain, to guard against harmful vapors rising from the body. Lady Macbeth will get the guards so drunk that their reason will become like a still (**limbeck**), producing confused thoughts.

72 quell: murder.

72–74 Bring forth . . . males: Your bold spirit (**undaunted mettle**) is better suited to raising males than females. Do you think Macbeth's words express admiration?

79–82 I am settled . . . know: Now that Macbeth has made up his mind, every part of his body (**each corporal agent**) is tightened like a bow. He and Lady Macbeth will return to the banquet and deceive everyone (**mock the time**), hiding their evil intent with gracious faces.

Connect to the Literature

1. **What Do You Think?** At this point, what are your impressions of Macbeth and his wife?

Comprehension Check

- What predictions do the three witches make about Macbeth's future?
- What do Macbeth and his wife plan to do to make the last prediction come true?
- What predictions do the witches make about Banquo?

Think Critically

2. What values do you think motivate Macbeth?

3. At this point in the play, who would you say is the more forceful character, Macbeth or Lady Macbeth? Why?

THINK ABOUT
- their ambitions and fears
- their attitudes toward Duncan
- their attitudes toward murder
- their attitudes toward each other

4. Do you think Macbeth would have formed his murderous plan if the witches hadn't made their predictions to him? Explain who you think controls Macbeth's fate.

5. What might the witches' predictions about Banquo mean?

6. **ACTIVE READING** SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE In Act One, Scene 7, what does Macbeth mean in the final sentence of his **soliloquy,** lines 25–28? You may want to refer to your READER'S NOTEBOOK for notes you took on the Strategies for Reading Shakespeare's Language.

Extend Interpretations

7. **What If?** Imagine that you are a friend and adviser of Macbeth and his wife. What advice would you give them? What would you tell them about the three witches' predictions?

8. **Critic's Corner** According to the critic L. C. Knights, "*Macbeth* defines a particular kind of evil—the evil that results from a lust for power." On the basis of what you have read so far, do you agree? Is excessive ambition the only source of Macbeth's "evil"? Support your opinion with details from Act One.

Literary Analysis

SOLILOQUY/ASIDE A **soliloquy** is a speech that reveals a character's private thoughts to the audience. An **aside** is a character's remark that others on the stage are not supposed to hear. Although unrealistic, the soliloquy and the aside allow playwrights to reveal characters' thoughts and motives that would otherwise remain hidden.

Paired Activity Working with a partner, identify revealing soliloquies and asides in Act One of *Macbeth,* and explain the thoughts and motives that they reveal. You might fill in a chart like the one below.

Act, Scene, Lines	Soliloquy or Aside?	What It Reveals
Act One, Scene 3, lines 116–117	Aside	Macbeth's ambition and his belief in the witches' prophecies

REVIEW CHARACTERIZATION Consider Duncan's speeches and actions, as well as the remarks that Macbeth and others make about him. What sort of person does Duncan seem to be? How good a king is he?