NEW SWAN SHAKESPEARE

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Macbeth

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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Macbeth

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to give and explain, in the simplest way, the text of one of Shakespeare's plays. The text itself is complete; notes and a glossary have been added to help the reader to understand the play. To get the greatest pleasure from it, he will need to learn something about the background of the play and the age in which it was written—and perhaps about Shakespeare himself, for example, or about drama as an art—but his first duty is to understand what the characters are saying and doing, and why they say and do these things.

With this end in view, and to ensure that the help given will in fact simplify the difficulties which are now met with in reading Shakespeare, explanations have been given within the range of a specially chosen list of 3,000 most commonly used English root-words. Every word in the book which falls outside this list is explained. This is done in the following way:

Words which are not used in everyday Modern English as Shakespeare used them, or which are not now used at all, will be found explained in notes on the pages facing the text;

Words which are still used in ordinary modern English with their meanings unchanged, but which are not among the 3,000 root-words of the chosen list, will be found explained in the glossary at the back of the book.

References to one or other of these places, and a study of section 2 of this introduction, should be sufficient to remove all difficulty in the understanding of the text. Explanations of longer passages are also given within the range of the word-list.

The rest of this introduction is arranged under the following headings:

1 *The Story of Macbeth*

Two Scottish generals, Macbeth and Banquo, while riding home after a victorious battle against an army of rebels, are met by three witches. These foretell that Macbeth shall be king of Scotland and Banquo the father of many kings. Macbeth is strongly influenced by their words, and his wife gives him so much encouragement that he is persuaded to murder Duncan, the king of Scotland, while he is a guest at their castle. Macbeth is now the most powerful man in the kingdom, and takes the throne. But he feels his position unsure, and suspects those around him; this drives him to the murder of Banquo, whose ghost haunts him. For the second time, Macbeth sees the witches, who warn him against the nobleman Macduff, but nevertheless persuade him to go on by telling him that "none of woman born" can harm him, and that no one will defeat him "till Birnam forest come to Dunsinane". Macduff has meanwhile gone to England to help in collecting an army to fight Macbeth, and in his absence his family is murdered by order of Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth, much disturbed in her mind, walks in her sleep, and speaks again her part in the crimes she has committed. She dies while a force, led on by Duncan's son Malcolm, and with English support, is besieging Macbeth's castle. The king realises that his position is desperate, but never loses courage, even when he finds that the witches' words have deceived him (for the forest *does* seem to move). And he is killed in hand-to-hand fighting by Macduff (who says that he was not "born of woman"). Malcolm then becomes king of Scotland.

2 *The Language and Imagery of the Play*

The English of Shakespeare's time was in many ways different from the English we speak today. A number of words or parts of words are listed below which are seldom used today as Shakespeare used them, but which occur so often in the play that it would waste space to explain them every time they appear. These words have either changed in meaning since Shakespeare's day, or fallen out of use altogether in everyday Modern English,

or are shortened forms which Shakespeare used for some special effect, e.g. so as to fit in with the metrical pattern of the lines.

(No attempt should be made to learn this list by heart; it is to be consulted when difficulties occur which are not explained in the notes.)

anon – "at once".
ay – "yes".

cousin, coz – any close relative (not necessarily the child of an uncle or aunt).
e'er – "ever".
ere – "before".
'gainst – "against".
'gins – "begins".
hence – "from this place".
hither – "to this place".
methinks – "it seems to me".
mine – (sometimes) "my".
morrow – "tomorrow".
ne'er – "never".
owe – (sometimes) "own".
presently – "at once".
pr'ythee – "please" (short for "I pray thee").
quoth – "said".
sooth – "truth".
still – (sometimes) "always".
't – "it"; e.g. *under 't* – "under it".
th' – "the".
thee – "you" (singular).
thence – "from that place".
thereafter – "after that".
thither – "to that place".
thou – "you" (singular).

This is the word often used as the second person singular subject; the verb associated with it ends in *-est* or *-st*, e.g.

"And that which rather *thou dost* fear to do . . ." (I.v.22).

The verb *to be* and a few others are, however, irregular in this respect, e.g.

"*Thou 'rt* (i.e. Thou art) mad to say it" (I.v.29)

"*Thou shalt* get kings" (I.iii.67).

we, us, our – "I, me, my"; kings often refer to themselves in this way.*
whence – "from which place".
wherefore – "for which reason" (compare *therefore* – "for this reason").
whiles – "whilst".
whither – "to which place".
ye – "you" (plural).

"of" is sometimes shortened to *o'*, and "is", "was" to *'s*.

* Malcolm begins to use these plural pronouns even before he is made king (e.g. at V.vi.4).

Like all poets, Shakespeare employed language in a way which is not usual for the making of direct statements in prose. A great deal of what he wrote is in fact not prose but verse. The lines of verse which he put into the mouths of his characters generally follow a fixed pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables; e.g.

/ / / / /
Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!
/ / / / /
Macbeth does murder sleep," – the innocent sleep . . .
(II.ii.34–5),

in which the rhythm depends upon five stressed syllables in each line. This may be taken as the normal arrangement, but completely regular rhythm, which would be dull and monotonous to listen to, is avoided by varying the positions of the stressed syllables in the lines, as in

/ / / / /
Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see (I.iv.53);

or a rhythmic stress may fall lightly on an unaccented syllable, as in

/ / / / /
But screw your courage to the sticking-place (I.vii.60).

Occasionally lines rhyme in a couplet, i.e. two lines next to one another; this is particularly common at the end of a scene or of a long speech. The first scene of Act II, for example, ends with the couplet:

Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a *knell*
That summons thee to heaven or to *hell* (II.i.63–4).

Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's later plays, and shows great freedom in the arrangement of the lines; his earlier plays, on the contrary, are much more regular metrically. The three parts of *Henry VI*, for example, have only a few lines which vary the rhythm of the five stressed syllables.

The poetic use of language is also characterised by imagery, which adds to ordinary statements visions of something different, but at the same time similar in some respects. Imagery may be expressed by the use of *simile* or *metaphor*.

A *simile* is a direct comparison between the subject itself and

the image which that subject recalls; e.g. Macbeth, at the end of the play, meets his enemies on the field of battle, and fights them hand-to-hand, and, speaking of himself, says:

> I cannot fly,
> But, bear-like, I must fight the course (v.vii.1–2).

Here he compares himself with a bear being baited to death. He, like a bear tied to a stake, must fight to the end, for he cannot escape.

A *metaphor* suggests a comparison without directly making it. Words used metaphorically refer at once to two or more different things, usually recalled together by the speaker in a moment of strong feeling. *Macbeth* has a great number of metaphors, and these are particularly common in the longer speeches. For example, Banquo, thinking of what the witches had told him about himself, says:

> . . . myself should be the root and father
> Of many kings (III.i.5–6).

He thinks of the prophecy made about him by the witches; what the third witch in fact said was:

> Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none (I.iii.67),

but he changes the message into a metaphorical statement by thinking of himself as a root, which is not a tree but from which the tree grows, with its branches spreading out and carrying seed which will itself produce more trees in time. In the same way Banquo will have children and grandchildren and so on, and among them will, the witch says, be many kings. He does not say he is like a root, or that he looks like one; he simply says that he is to be "the root . . . Of many kings"

The effect of an image is often heightened by an awareness that certain ideas run through the whole imagery of the play, binding it organically as the plot does. In *Macbeth* a great deal of the imagery refers to clothing and the covering up of the body with cloth of some kind. When Macbeth begins to lose his power, and

people know for certain that his rise to kingship was made possible only by murder, Angus says of him:

> now does he feel his title
> Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
> Upon a dwarfish thief (v.ii.20–2).

When Macduff says:

> (Macbeth) is already named (King), and gone to Scone
> To be invested (II.iv.31–2)

he is using a metaphor which is part of the common language, for *to invest* means "to give a title as an honour" with the idea that with the title go the clothes which are appropriate to it. In the same way, when Rosse tells Macbeth he has been made Thane of Cawdor, Macbeth asks

> why do you dress me
> In borrowed robes? (I.iii.108–9).

And a few lines further on Macduff continues the metaphor by referring to the old times, before Macbeth became king, as "our old robes" (II.iv.38; see note 35 on p. 88).

There are many other instances, often more subtle than these. Angus wonders whether the Thane of Cawdor whom Macbeth fought in the battle

> did line the rebel
> With hidden help and vantage (I.iii.112–13),

which suggests the lining or strengthening sewn in under the cloth when clothing is made. And when Lady Macbeth is planning the murder of Duncan, she asks "thick night" to *pall* or wrap itself in the smoke of hell; and a moment afterwards she speaks of "the *blanket* of the dark" (I.v.48–9, 51). A good deal of this imagery is described in the notes, and more is to be found in the play; its subject-matter helps to bind the play together artistically, and adds greatly to its interest and beauty. A poet naturally deals in images, since it is his business to make his hearers (or readers) see things with fresh eyes. A new, unexpected comparison or series of comparisons is one of the best ways to this end, and Shakespeare is a master of imagery.

Most of *Macbeth* is poetry, and the kind of striking and beautiful imagery illustrated above is a particular property of great poetry. The only prose passages of any length in the play are the speeches of the Porter in II.iii. This indicates Shakespeare's general practice: prose is used for the humbler and comic characters, while the nobler ones use verse. Since *Macbeth* is concerned almost entirely with men and women of noble birth, nearly all the play is in verse. Lady Macbeth, in V.i, speaks prose when she recalls in her sleep-walking the actions she has taken part in; and Lady Macduff uses prose when she talks to her son (IV.ii), even though the emotion of this scene is intense. An exception to this rule is the scene in which Banquo is murdered; here the Murderers have some beautiful lines of poetry to speak:

> The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day:
> Now spurs the lated traveller apace,
> To gain the timely inn . . . (III.iii.5–7).

Although Shakespeare wrote for the theatre, not for silent readers, and we must, when we are reading his plays, always try to visualize them as they appear on the stage, he was also, in the best sense, a dealer in words, and to watch his language at work is the best way to understand him well. The play itself shows how great was his interest in words, for Macbeth's confidence rests in two forms of words, one about men born of woman and the other about Birnam wood moving. He finds at last that the words without the spirit behind them have deceived him, and, when he realizes that he is trapped and doomed to die, he curses the supernatural powers which have led him astray:

> be these juggling fiends no more believed,
> That palter with us in a double sense,
> That keep the word of promise to our ear,
> And break it to our hope (V.viii.19–22).

3 *The Play as Drama*

As we read a play of Shakespeare, we may sometimes forget that what we have before us is not essentially a book at all, but the words of a play, something which was written to be spoken and

acted on the stage of a theatre. A reading of the play cannot be fully successful unless this is kept in mind, and the student should therefore take every opportunity of speaking the lines aloud rather than reading them silently. We cannot all be actors, nor have all of us the time or ability to learn long speeches. But we can, perhaps, read parts together or "stage" some striking scenes, even if it means acting with book in hand, and in doing this try to imagine the play as it might appear on the stage.

One cannot go very far in this living presentation of the play without realising that the theatre for which it was written differed in some ways from our own. For example, the stage in Shakespeare's day stretched far out into the open space where the audience sat or stood – so far, in fact, that they were gathered round three sides of it. The fourth side extended back a considerable way, and formed a recess which was roofed over by a second floor. A good deal of action could be set on the upper floor itself; in the murder scene (II.ii) Macbeth might go up to Duncan there, and whisper to his wife below when the murder is done; and here Lady Macbeth might walk in her sleep (V.i).

This old type of stage was most suitable, too, on the occasions when an actor speaks to himself, so as to let the audience know what he is thinking, or speaks directly to the audience. Such passages often occur in Shakespeare's plays; and in his time the actor who was to speak them could walk to the front of the stage, in close contact with the audience, but at a distance from the other actors. It was, therefore, unnecessary for him to speak in other than his ordinary voice. When Macbeth was left alone after the murder of Duncan (II.ii), he could express his thoughts and his horror in such a way that those watching him seemed to be overhearing the words of a man who had come amongst them. His vision of the dagger (II.i) could likewise be acted in close touch with the audience.

As far as is known, no stage lighting and practically no scenery were used in Shakespeare's theatre, and this, as it happens, was to our advantage. For in place of painted scenery, Shakespeare put into the mouths of his characters splendid descriptions, poetry which paints the scenes in the mind's eye. Banquo tells us enough about the setting of Macbeth's castle (I.vi) to bring

its spirit of calm before our eyes. Nightfall is described by Macbeth (III.ii) so vividly that the actual dimming of lights would be unnecessary.

It is natural to wonder where Shakespeare found the material for the story of Macbeth, and to wonder also whether any of it actually happened in history.

A Macbeth did, in fact, live in Scotland about the middle of the eleventh century; he, with Macduff, Duncan, Malcolm and Macdonwald, appear in a number of old works on the history of Scotland. But each of these sources tells a somewhat different story, and it is certain that Shakespeare's main source was one particular book, Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*; Shakespeare used the second edition of this book, which was published in 1586. He did not feel in the least bound to follow Holinshed's story, however, and the details of one incident in the play are often taken from another incident in the book; for example, Donwald murders King Duff in the *Chronicles*, and the circumstances of this murder are taken over by Shakespeare to support his story of the murder of Duncan. There is, of course, nothing wrong in this, because Shakespeare is making a play, not writing history, and the interest of the plot lies in the way the incidents are brought together to make a complete and quickly-moving story.

Although the play *Macbeth* was not published until 1623, in the great collection of Shakespeare's plays known as the First Folio, there is evidence within the play and also in other places that it was written some years earlier, in or about 1606. In that year references to *Macbeth* begin to be made in other (dated) plays, and certain passages in the play undoubtedly refer to James I as the reigning king, or were written to please him. Examples of such references are explained in note 73 on page 152, and note 111 on page 180.

4 *The Construction of the Play*

Macbeth is perhaps the easiest to follow of all Shakespeare's plays. It is constructed in such a way that almost everything which

takes place refers directly to the main story, that of Macbeth's rise to power and his downfall. In the first half of the play Macbeth is shown as a noble soldier who, encouraged by natural events (his rise to power as a soldier) and supernatural ones (his meeting with the "weird women" on the heath) kills the king so that he may become king himself. When he fears failure his wife is at his side to urge him on, and together they carry out the murder of King Duncan while he is staying at their castle. Macbeth becomes king, but feels unsafe until Banquo, a truly noble and gracious soldier, is dead and can no longer influence the minds of the people against their new ruler.

The climax of the play occurs in Act III, Scene iii, where Banquo is killed by murderers whom Macbeth has hired, and Fleance, Banquo's son, escapes. This means that Macbeth is safe for the moment; he is king, as the witches prophesied. But Banquo's son is alive, and can therefore continue his line, which, as the witches showed, was to bear many kings.

After this climax, the forces ranged against Macbeth quickly become more powerful. In England, King Duncan's son is promised aid in his fight against Macbeth; in Scotland, the people are appalled at the cruel murder of Macduff's wife and children after Macduff himself has joined the forces agamst Macbeth. Within Macbeth's castle his wife is deranged in mind because of the deeds she has taken part in, while Macbeth himself seems to grow braver as the opposition becomes stronger. Outside the castle the people join forces against their king, and, in the final short scenes, Macbeth fights them until he meets Macduff face to face. Macbeth is killed and Malcolm, the rightful heir of Duncan, is declared king in his place.

There is nothing in the play which can be looked upon as a secondary plot. The scenes in which the witches appear encourage Macbeth and, as he learns at the end, deceive him. The scene in England shows how the forces opposing Macbeth are being built up. The murder of Lady Macduff and her children is a display of Macbeth's ruthless cruelty. Perhaps only the testing of Macduff (IV.iii) and the account of the king's miraculous power over the "king's evil" lie a little to one side of the main stream of the story. The first of these incidents is taken from Holinshed, and would

have seemed more important to Shakespeare's audience than it does to us, since fear of usurped power and deceit among rulers played a great part in their minds; and the second matter was certainly agreeable to King James I, who was interested in the supernatural and would like a reference to the supposed divine power placed in a king. But in general the play moves fast and direct; it tells of a hero moving to his destruction, and its ultimate power depends on its unswerving movement. As Macbeth dominates the drama, so the plot is essentially the progress of his kingship.

It is generally agreed that some parts of the play as we now know it were not written by Shakespeare, but were added to the original by another hand. The most important of these additions is Act III, Scene v, which, as suggested on p. 134, presents a view of Macbeth agreeing neither with what comes before nor with what follows. Most editors believe that Hecate's lines at IV.i.39–43 are likewise by another writer. Each of these passages includes the mention of a song by its title only. These songs appear in full in a play called *The Witch*, written, at about the same time as *Macbeth*, by Thomas Middleton, and some have thought that it was Middleton who wrote the additions to *Macbeth*. Perhaps *Macbeth* and *The Witch* were being presented by the same actors at about the same time, and, when the plays were taken down in writing, there was some confusion between the two.

The construction of the whole play may have been affected by these additions. A theatrical entertainment must not be too long for the audience to watch and enjoy at one time, but it must not be so short as to send them away disappointed. It has therefore been suggested that some parts of the original play were removed when the extra scene and lines were given to the witches. If this is true it may help to explain some points in the play which appear inconsistent. In the original play there might, for example, have been a longer account of the battles against the rebels, in which Macbeth so distinguished himself, and this might have explained why Macbeth met and defeated the king of Norway and the traitor Cawdor in the battle (I.ii.53–60) and yet later he tells the witches that the Thane of Cawdor "lives, A prosperous gentleman" (I.iii.72–3). It is very likely that Cawdor

was fighting for the invaders in secret, as Angus suggests a short while after:

> Whether he was combined
> With those of Norway, or did line the rebel
> With hidden ("secret") help and vantage . . .
> I know not (I.iii.111–14)

—but we cannot be certain. Again, we are not told fully of the plotting of Duncan's murder. Many lines suggest that Lady Macbeth believed she would herself kill the king; she says,

> Come, thick night, . . .
> That my keen knife see not the wound it makes . . .

and, to her husband when he arrives,

> . . . you shall put
> This night's great business into my despatch;

and

> Leave all the rest to me (I.v.48, 50; 65–6; 71).

All this might possibly mean that she would manage everything, and Macbeth would actually kill Duncan; but Macbeth must, at some time before this, have discussed the plan with his wife, since she asks him later

> What beast was 't then
> That made you break this enterprise to me?
> (I.vii.47–8).

It seems not impossible that something is missing here, but that need not harm our enjoyment of the play. In the incident with Cawdor, the dramatic point is the fulfilment of the witches' prophecy; in the plotting of Duncan's murder, we are shown the complete understanding which exists between Macbeth and his wife.

5 *The Characters*

Macbeth himself dominates the drama; the play is his, for it is the story of his rise and fall. Before he first appears he is spoken of as brave and noble, and Duncan willingly honours him as a

trusted lord; he calls him "valiant cousin" and "worthy gentleman". But his character, like the day he speaks of when we first see him, is "foul and fair", and his figure is truly tragic, for he is a man, not wholly bad, against whom the forces of evil are too strong, and their temptations too attractive.

He is ambitious, and the witches he suddenly comes upon when he first appears in the play are an image of the evil forces which encourage this ambition. He lusts for power and they prophesy he will be king. To Macbeth these prophecies can be neither good nor bad; for if bad, how could they so soon begin to come true? And if good, why do his thoughts so soon turn to the idea of murdering King Duncan and taking his place on the throne of Scotland? Throughout the play Macbeth continues to give serious thought to the moral aspects of his actions, and he is in no sense an unfeeling villain without conscience or sense of nobility. This is shown when he wants to talk over with Banquo the prophecy of the witches:

> Think upon what hath chanced; and at more time,
> The interim having weighed it, let us speak
> Our free hearts each to other (I.iii.153–5).

It is felt in many other places, leading him to an expression of the condition of damnation: thinking of the consequences of his crimes, he says he will not worry about what might happen to him in the next world so long as he is granted peace of mind in this:

> that but this blow
> Might be the be-all and the end-all here, . . .
> We'd jump the life to come (I.vii.4–5, 7).

But even this is impossible, and he knows it. He makes up his mind to go no further with plans for the murder of Duncan. His wife, however, persuades him to go forward—Holinshed writes of her as "burning in unquenchable desire to bear the name of a queen"—and after some agreement between them, Macbeth kills his king while he is a guest in Macbeth's castle. By this crime Macbeth has bought the kingship through evil, and sold his soul to his ambition. Although many must doubt his honesty, no one

is brave enough to defy him openly when he kills the grooms to make it seem that they are guilty. Even the lines which Macbeth speaks when he announces the murder ring false and hollow, and arouse the suspicions of Malcolm and Donalbain, who flee from Scotland. Macbeth is quick to notice this, and turns suspicion on to them:

> our bloody cousins are bestowed
> In England and in Ireland; not confessing
> Their cruel parricide (II.i.29–31),

but his real fears now lie in Banquo, whose "royalty of nature", bravery and wisdom recommend him as more suited to kingship than Macbeth. Again Macbeth makes plans to have suspicion placed on his victim; he persuades the two murderers that they are being downtrodden by Banquo.

The climax of the play is the scene in which Banquo is murdered according to Macbeth's instruction. Macbeth himself has had many uneasy feelings about the crime, but in the end it is he who, in effect, tells his wife not to worry:

> Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
> Till thou applaud the deed (III.ii.46–7).

He should then feel safe from all his enemies, but fate quickly descends upon him in a most horrible form. At the banquet prepared as if to celebrate Macbeth's feeling of final safety, Banquo's ghost comes to haunt him. This is a terrible punishment both for his crime and also for the evil pretence of expecting Banquo to be at the banquet. Lady Macbeth cannot see the ghost, but, such is the sympathy between her and her husband, she knows or guesses all that has happened, and begins to make excuses for him. He cannot support her in her own pretence, and when the ghost appears a second time Macbeth loses his nerve.

He now stands in great need of encouragement and goes to the witches to get it. They show him apparitions which give him promises concerning his fate, but the last apparition is none other than Banquo's ghost, which brings Macbeth back to his latest crime. The prophetic promises turn out to be as evil as the murders; Macbeth is "possessed", and, knowing he is now too far

gone in crime to turn back, he vows that in future he will think and act at the same time:

> From this moment
> The very firstlings of my heart shall be
> The firstlings of my hand (IV.i.146–8).

After this, Macbeth's touches of humanity become rarer. The murder of Lady Macduff and her children is possibly even more horrible than his other crimes, because it seems carried out simply to accord with his vow, and without the least reason. He is driven into his castle of Dunsinane and eventually fights with the ferocity of a wounded animal. When he is told of his wife's death his humanity momentarily returns. He thinks of the passage of life, so rapid and apparently so meaningless, and is awoken to the immediate situation by the message that the wood of Birnam is in fact moving. The first evil promise of the witches has proved worthless; but he fights on, only to meet at last his enemy Macduff, whose family he has so needlessly killed. Macduff kills him, and the second of the witches' promises is shown also to be worthless. To the end Macbeth fights bravely and this bravery is something outside the sense of safety which the witches' promises had given him. But evil has killed hope in him, and he meets his death because he has put his trust in what was either evil or worthless. Banquo's warning had once shown him the danger, but he had been either unwilling or unable to respect it:

> The instruments of darkness . . .
> Win us with honest trifles, to betray 's
> In deepest consequence (I.iii.124–6).

Duncan is, with Banquo, in striking contrast to Macbeth. As king of Scotland, Duncan is taken to be an old man, and appears in the play to be honourable, trusting and humble in carrying out the duties of his position. We see him first when his country is hard-pressed by invaders from Norway and rebels at home. In this struggle Macbeth distinguishes himself as a great fighter, and Duncan hears good reports of him with great pleasure. But what the king says of the rebel Thane of Cawdor shows his own

particular difficulty: he is too trusting, too ready to accept what seems to be true:

> There 's no art
> To find the mind's construction in the face:
> He (Cawdor) was a gentleman on whom I built
> An absolute trust (I.iv.11–14).

Duncan is, therefore, powerless when he has to face evil, and he puts himself gently and meekly into the hands of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, his host and hostess, without taking the normal precautions of having an armed guard posted near where he is sleeping. The two attendants he has by him have, like him, enjoyed a good party, and are sleepy and useless. The king goes to rest, well fed and happy in his hostess's assertions of loyalty and friendship towards him. He is murdered in his sleep by Macbeth. Duncan has proved to be fatally easy ground for his followers to plant their ambitions in. It is Lady Macbeth who has in the end some sort of finer feelings about him:

> Had he not resembled
> My father as he slept, I had done 't (II.ii.12–13).

Banquo, like Duncan, is pictured as good, brave and gracious. Both these men are, because of their positions and their honourable natures, great dangers to Macbeth in his ambitions, for their goodness contrasts too plainly with his wickedness. Like Duncan too, Banquo trusts too readily in appearances; they are both too easily deceived into thinking all is well in Macbeth's castle because its situation is attractive:

> This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
> By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here (I.vi.3–6).

Banquo is close to the king and also to Macbeth; he arrives with Duncan at Macbeth's castle, and, when the party for the king is over, he meets Macbeth after midnight and shows that his thoughts are full of the prophecy of the witches, whom he and Macbeth came upon at the beginning of the play. They have no

time to talk at length, yet Banquo has already sensed something evil springing up in Macbeth's mind, for he says, half to himself, half to Fleance:

> merciful powers!
> Restrain in me the cursèd thoughts that nature
> Gives way to in repose! (II.i.7–9).

When Macduff discovers that Duncan has been murdered, Banquo, unlike Macbeth, expresses his grief simply and from the heart. He soon voices his suspicions of Macbeth:

> Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
> As the weird women promised; and, I fear,
> Thou playedst most foully for 't (III.i.1–3).

But he does nothing; perhaps he is satisfied for the moment to watch events, and in any case he too is concerned in the witches' prophecies. But for this he is given no time. Macbeth quickly convinces two murderers that Banquo is the person who in secret makes them suffer cruelty and injustice, and, when Banquo is returning with his son in the evening after a day away from the castle, he is murdered. Macbeth pretends that he is expected at the banquet arranged for that evening, and his ghost, covered in blood, comes and sits in Macbeth's own chair. Macbeth is overcome with the horror of the apparition, and the party breaks up.

He is, nevertheless, to see Banquo once again. The witches show Macbeth eight kings, with many more reflected in a mirror, and the ghost of Banquo following them. This signifies to Macbeth that, although Banquo has been murdered by his orders, Fleance, Banquo's son, has escaped, and is destined to be the father of a line of kings; although Macbeth has won the throne, it is foretold that his children will never follow him in a royal line.

Macduff is the nobleman who discovered the murder of Duncan. Commanded to call early on his king, he enters the king's chamber and quickly returns with horror in his eyes and voice. Macbeth pretends not to understand him. It is Macduff who first expresses surprise at Macbeth admitting that he had himself murdered the grooms who were attending the king. "Wherefore