

Act 1, Scene 1

Act 1, Scene 1 Summary

Three Witches meet in a desert place with thunder, lightening and rain. They vow to meet again when some mighty battle is over before the sun sets on the heath. They will meet with Macbeth. There is something murky, something terrible in the air; a sense of anticipation of something about to happen on a large scale.

Act 1, Scene 1 Analysis

We are introduced to Macbeth's key deceivers in this play. Undeniably interesting, the Witches' give themselves away as deceptive and cruel in the very beginning.

Act 1, Scene 2

Act 1, Scene 2 Summary

Duncan, Malcolm, Donalbain, Lennox, in a camp near Forres, meet a wounded Sergeant, who Malcolm solicits to inform Duncan, the King of Scotland, regarding the battle fought to liberate Malcolm from captivity. The soldier replies that the rebel, Macdonwald, initially fought valiantly, as equals, against Macbeth until finally Macbeth ripped him in half with his sword and hung his head upon the battlements. Then, the enemy, the Norwegian lord, struck hard again. But the two captains, although perhaps outnumbered, redoubled their efforts, facing a painful defeat. Surgeons are sent for to assist the Sergeant who is overcome by his wounds. Ross enters, reporting that the fight against the Norwegian King, assisted by the thane of Cowdor is over. Victory belongs to Duncan! The Norwegian King must pay tribute in order to bury his men. The thane of Cowdor, who rebelled against Duncan, will die, surrendering his title to Macbeth.

Act 1, Scene 2 Analysis

This is a scene which celebrates a great victory over a rebellious nobleman, the thane of Cowder, who assisted Sweno, a Norwegian King. We see in this scene the great contempt the victors have for the rebels. Macbeth has literally split his enemy with his sword and cut off his head, displaying it for all the armies to see. The enemy is characterized as powerful, but very evil and rebellious. Macbeth is a kind of cruel hero.

Act 1, Scene 3

Act 1, Scene 3 Summary

The battle is now over and the Witches now show up in a heath near Forres, scene of the battle. One of the Witches has been affronted by a sailor's wife who would not share her chestnuts, munching them ungraciously while she watched. In revenge, the Witch vows revenge against her husband, cursing him with sleeplessness and tempests, drained and exhausted. Macbeth and Banquo come, surprised and disgusted with these strange creatures. The Witches prophesy that Macbeth will become thane of Cowdor and, eventually King. Banquo is skeptical and somewhat disgusted with their manly, though female, appearance. They answer his request for prophesy with the claim that he will not be a king, but he will be father to kings. Suddenly, the Witches vanish, leaving both of them astonished. Suddenly, Ross and Angus appear. In fact, Macbeth will be thane of Cowdor after all, for the thane, although still alive, faces execution. Does that prove that Macbeth will be King? Macbeth is full of this idea but Banquo is skeptical, thinking that sometimes the dark forces will feed men a little bit of truth in order to destroy them later by the strength of some great deception.

Act 1, Scene 3 Analysis

Is Macbeth making a mistake by ignoring his friend, Banquo? Banquo has warned him about taking himself too seriously just because the Witches have made a prophecy. As in Hamlet, the force of the supernatural is looked at as grievous and very dark and ugly. The Witches themselves are sly, cruel and mischievous- as revealed in their conversations with each other. Should Macbeth really trust them? Macbeth is the story of ambition fed and supported by a supernatural influence. We do not have to hunt far for Macbeth's hubris or fatal weakness. It is right here in the beginning when allows the Witch's ambiguous and unclear prophecy to support and feed his ambition. Banquo, at this point, when faced with the same temptation, refuses to be ruled by these creatures' promises.

Act 1, Scene 4

Act 1, Scene 4 Summary

Duncan inquires as the status of the original thane of Cowdor's execution. Malcolm tells him that the rebel thane confessed, asked Duncan's pardon- then died like a gentleman, with great dignity, with a seeming indifference to his death. Macbeth, Banquo, Ross and Angus enter. Duncan expresses his great gratitude towards Macbeth. He expresses the same towards Banquo but bestows the title of Prince of Cumberland and his estate on Malcolm, his eldest son, who is now clearly heir to the throne. Macbeth, still reeling from the Witches' prophecy, sees this as an obstacle to his climb towards the throne.

Act 1, Scene 4 Analysis

Macbeth knows that he is carrying "black and deep desires." He is consciously evil. In that sense, his relationship to Duncan, as his true and faithful servant, is tainted by his ambition, as will be his relationship to himself and to all others in this play.

Act 1, Scene 5

Act 1, Scene 5 Summary

The next scene takes place in Macbeth's castle in Inverness, where Lady Macbeth is reading a letter from Macbeth. The letter recounts his encounter with the three "weird sisters" and the prophecy of his ensuing Kingship. He wishes her to share in his rejoicing, referring to her as "my dearest partner of greatness." She, in soliloquy, conveys her fear that Macbeth is too soft, too filled with "the milk of human kindness" to do the things he must do to fulfill the prophecy. She waits eagerly to advise him as to his course now the Fates have stepped in to prepare his for his glorious crown. Hearing that Duncan will arrive in her castle after Macbeth, she invokes the forces of darkness to prepare her for a murderous intrigue against the King that will accelerate her husband to the throne. Macbeth now comes. She tells him- play the innocent before Duncan, but underneath retain the serpent's cunning. She tells him to leave everything else to her.

Act 1, Scene 5 Analysis

Before, Macbeth's ambition had been aimless. Though there are obstacles offered to him by Duncan's passage of the throne to his eldest, Malcolm, he makes no plot or calculation. His wife, hearing the news, decides that she will drive him to his destiny, to assume the throne and fulfill the prophecy; namely, murder. He says little regarding her offer to him and we are unsure if he will take this dark step to fulfill his "black and deep desire." Lady Macbeth is the very personification of warped, murderous ambition.

Act 1, Scene 6

Act 1, Scene 6 Summary

Duncan, Malcolm, Donalbain and Banquo, Lennox, Macduff, Ross, Angus, and attendants enter the scene stand before Macbeth's castle. Duncan and Banquo discuss how pleasant and inviting Macbeth's castle appears to them. Lady Macbeth greets them. Duncan says how they had tried to catch up with him but his great love of his lady no doubt helped spur his horses on, fast ahead of the royal entourage. She is painfully obsequious in making them welcome. He asks her to lead him to his host, Macbeth.

Act 1, Scene 6 Analysis

After their great victory, Duncan and his royal entourage eagerly await the presence of Macbeth again, partaking of his hospitality, no doubt in celebration of his newly appointed title and his contribution to their cause. Duncan and perhaps the audience are disarmed by the welcoming hospitality of the smiling, adoring Lady Macbeth. She, like the witches, is a great deceiver.

Act 1, Scene 7

Act 1, Scene 7 Summary

Macbeth, in soliloquy, states very clearly that it is not the time to kill Duncan. He will very likely, if committing this crime, be forced to take the "poison'd chalice" to his own lips. He is both a precious kinsman to Duncan as well as his host. Besides this, Duncan has been such a great and true king to his people that the tears following his death would "drown the wind." But Macbeth's caution does not sit well with his "dear partner," Lady Macbeth, who furiously chides him for his fastidiousness in taking action, implying even that he is a rank coward. She would tear her child from her own breast and dash its brains out if she had made the promises that Macbeth has made. Her plan is to drug Duncan's chamberlains with wine and kill Duncan with their daggers while they sleep. Their chambers will be covered with blood, as well as their daggers. Their guilt will be assumed as Lady Macbeth and her husband cry out in anguish at Duncan's death.

Act 1, Scene 7 Analysis

In this scene, we clearly see two kinds of evil- the evil of ambition, personified by Macbeth, who, though seeming capable of plotting murder without remorse, has not lost touch with the social and political consequences of his action. Lady Macbeth personifies an even deeper type of evil, uncontrolled ambition completely unchecked by inhibition or conscience. Lady Macbeth represents an overwhelming, emotional commitment and surrender to the lust for power. While Macbeth, an ambitious but brave man, has some contentment within himself, some semblance of self-esteem with or without the throne, his wife sees no contentment without the throne and is totally lost in her dreams of power. For her, there are no alternatives to her goals but total ruthlessness.