

MACBETH – Lady Macbeth’s development

Act 1, Scene 5: Macbeth’s Letter

Master Plotter

- Macbeth sends her a letter telling her of the witches’ prophecy.
- After reading Macbeth’s letter, she is immediately concerned that he doesn’t have the mettle to seize the crown.

‘Yet do I fear thy nature; It is too full o’ the’ milk of human kindness’. (ACT 1, Scene 5: 15-16)

- She wants him home, so

*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...* (Act 1, Scene 5: 25-6)

- She knows the best way of achieving this goal is to kill Duncan. When the messenger arrives at their castle, she calls on evil spirits:

*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* (Act 1, Scene 5: 39-42)

- Lady Macbeth advises her husband about how to conduct himself when the king arrives.

Act 1, Scene 7: Duncan’s Murder

Manipulator

- Macbeth is utterly ridden by doubt. Duncan is his king and guest; and he is a good man. He will not go through with the plan.

*I have no spur
to prick the sides of my intent* (Act 1, Scene 7: 25-26)

- Lady Macbeth calls him a coward, and repeatedly attacks his masculinity.

*Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem’st the ornament of life,
And lie a coward in thine own esteem
Letting ‘I dare not’ wait upon ‘I would’
Like the poor cat i’ th’ adage?* (Act 1, Scene 7: 41-45)

When you durst do it, then you were a man (Act 1, Scene 7: 49)

- She shocks Macbeth into action by saying that, had she sworn to kill her child, she would dash its brains against a wall rather than break her oath.
- She rejects the idea that they could fail, and then plans Duncan’s assassination.

We fail?

*But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we'll not fail.*

(Act 1, Scene 7: 59-61)

- Macbeth prays that she only give birth to male children, because her fearless spirit should produce only men.

Act 2, Scene 2: Immediately after the Murder

Practical under Pressure

- Lady Macbeth says that the alcohol which got Duncan's servants drunk has made her bold.

That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold.

What hath quenched them hath given me fire.

(Act 2, Scene 2: 1-2)

- Macbeth is in a state after the murder. Lady Macbeth tells him not to think about it too much. When he tells her he couldn't say 'Amen' – it stuck in his throat, she tells him:

These deeds must not be thought

After these ways. So, it will make us mad.

(Act 2, Scene 2: 31-32)

- She tells Macbeth that he needs to smear the sleeping guards with blood; he refuses. She calls him a coward again, and does it herself.

Infirm of purpose!

*Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures.*

(Act 2, Scene 2: 50-51)

- After Macbeth talks about having enough blood on his hands to turn the sea red, Lady Macbeth compares her own demeanour to his.

*My hands are of your colour, but I shame
To wear a heart so white.*

(Act 2, Scene 2:62-63)

Act 2, Scene 3: The Morning after the Murder

Slipping?

- The lords wake up and discover the murder. Lady Macbeth feigns shock at hearing what has happened.
- Macbeth tells them how he murdered the king's guards in a violent rage; as soon as he finishes, Lady Macbeth swoons and asks for help leaving.

Help me hence, ho!

(Act 2, Scene 2: 114)

- There are multiple interpretations of this moment –

