## 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 –

- I) Is Lady Macbeth causing a distraction so that Macbeth's story isn't scrutinised too closely?
- II) Is she frightened by Macbeth's anger his murder of the guards? (bearing in mind she was the one who pushed and prodded him into killing Duncan to begin with).
- III) Is she suffering a shock of guilt at the deaths of the king and his two innocent guards?

### Act 3, Scene 4: The Banquet Scene

**Losing Control** 

- Lady Macbeth tries to make excuses for her husband's erratic behaviour. She tells the guests that he's suffering from fits.
- She tries to control her husband using the same strategies as before, but these strategies fail.

LADY MACBETH

Are you a man?

**MACBETH** 

Aye, and a bold one, that dare look on that

Which might appal the devil.

(Act 3, Scene 4: 59-61)

• She does not share her husband's faith in the supernatural.

When all's done,

You look but on a stool.

(Act 3, Scene 4: 67-68)

- She expresses sadness that her husband's 'fit' is ruining the dinner, and ushers them out when he starts to rant and rave.
- Macbeth pays little attention to her at the end of the scene; at the end of the scene she doesn't get
  much of a word in, and he resolves to go and visit the witches.

#### Act 5, Scene 1: Sleepwalking

**Broken** 

• Since Macbeth went to war, Lady Macbeth has been sleep-walking. As she sleepwalks, she rubs her hands together. Her gentlewoman says she has seen her do this for fifteen minutes at a stretch.

Out, damned spot! Out, I say! – One, two. Why then, 'tis Time to do 't. Hell is murky! – Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, And afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to account? – Yet who would have

Thought the old man to have had so much blood in him.

(Act 5, Scene 1: 30-34)

• She voices guilt about Duncan's murder, about the slaughter of MacDuff's family.

Here's the smell of blood still. All the perfumes of

Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. Oh, Oh, Oh!

(Act 5, Scene 1: 42-43)

What's done cannot be

undone. – To bed, to bed, to bed!

(Act 5, Scene 1: 57-58)