

Macbeth

Common Misconceptions Study Booklet



The play is Elizabethan

Lady Macbeth is a man

Macbeth is a coward

Banquo does not care about the prophecies

Lady Macbeth is just a villain

Macbeth goes mad

The play ends happily

Banquo does not care about the prophecies

Banquo is initially sceptical about the prophecies, but that doesn't mean he's not intrigued by them. He reflects alone on stage in A3S1 that Macbeth 'has it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all' and wonders 'May they not be my oracle as well'.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

BANQUO	Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all, As the weird women promis'd, and I fear Thou play'dst most foully for't; yet it was said It should not stand in thy posterity, But that myself should be the root and father	5
	Of many kings. If there come truth from them – As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine – Why, by the verities on thee made good, May they not be my oracles as well And set me up in hope? But hush, no more.	10

Lady Macbeth is just a villain

Lady Macbeth is manipulative and ruthless, but she's also vulnerable. She concedes that she doesn't have it in her to kill Duncan herself because he resembles her 'father as he slept' and, later on, she becomes increasingly concerned by Macbeth's tyranny. And then there's A5S1: 'Out, damned spot!'

ACT 5, SCENE 1

LADY MACBETH	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?	35
DOCTOR	Do you mark that?	
LADY MACBETH	The thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o'that, my lord, no more o'that. You mar all with this starting.	40
DOCTOR	Go to, go to; you have known what you should not.	
GENTLEWOMAN	She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that. Heaven knows what she has known.	
LADY MACBETH	Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O.	45

Macbeth goes mad

There are clear points in the play where Macbeth behaves irrationally. However, to say he just goes mad is an oversimplification. For example, when he is alone at Dunsinane, he speaks calmly and coherently about his age and increasing isolation: 'My way of life / Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf'.

ACT 5, SCENE 3

MACBETH	Seyton! – I am sick at heart,	
	When I behold – Seyton, I say! – this push	20
	Will cheer me ever or disseat me now.	
	I have liv'd long enough. My way of life	
	Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf,	
	And that which should accompany old age,	
	As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,	25
	I must not look to have; but, in their stead,	
	Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,	
	Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.	
	Seyton!	

