

Macbeth Summary

Three witches tell the Scottish general Macbeth that he will be King of Scotland. Encouraged by his wife, Macbeth kills the king, becomes the new king, and kills more people out of paranoia. Civil war erupts to overthrow Macbeth, resulting in more death.

Act I

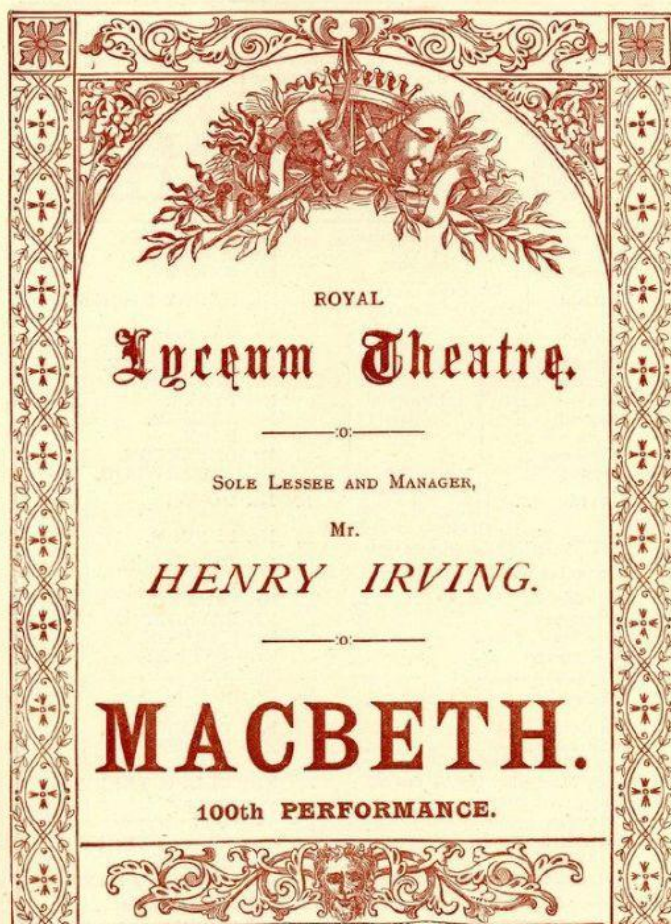
On a bleak Scottish moorland, Macbeth and Banquo, two of King Duncan's generals, discover three strange women (witches). The witches prophesy that Macbeth will be promoted twice: to Thane of Cawdor (a rank of the aristocracy bestowed by grateful kings) and King of Scotland. Banquo's descendants will be kings, but Banquo isn't promised any kingdom himself. The generals want to hear more, but the "weird sisters" disappear.

Soon afterwards, King Duncan names Macbeth Thane of Cawdor as a reward for his success in the recent battles. The promotion seems to support the prophecy. The King then proposes to make a brief visit that night to Macbeth's castle at Inverness. Lady Macbeth receives news from her husband about the prophecy and his new title. She vows to help him become king by whatever means are necessary ("ominous music").

Is this a dagger which I see before me?

— MACBETH, ACT 2 SCENE 1

Macbeth with Henry Irving Programme, 1889



Act II

Macbeth returns to his castle, followed almost immediately by King Duncan. The Macbeths plot together to kill Duncan and wait until everyone is asleep. At the appointed time, Lady Macbeth gives the guards drugged wine so Macbeth can enter and kill the King. He regrets this almost immediately, but his wife reassures him. She leaves the bloody daggers by the dead king just before Macduff, a nobleman, arrives. When Macduff discovers the murder, Macbeth kills the drunken guards in a show of rage and retribution. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, flee, fearing for their own lives; but they are, nevertheless, blamed for the murder.

Act III

Macbeth becomes King of Scotland but is plagued by feelings of insecurity. He remembers the prophecy that Banquo's descendants will inherit the throne and arranges for Banquo and his son Fleance to be killed. In the darkness, Banquo is murdered, but his son escapes the assassins. At his state banquet that night, Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo and worries the courtiers with his mad response. Lady Macbeth dismisses the court and unsuccessfully tries to calm her husband.

Act IV

Macbeth seeks out the witches who say that he will be safe until a local wood, Birnam Wood, marches into battle against him. He also need not fear anyone born of woman (that sounds secure, no loop-holes here). They also prophesy that the Scottish succession will still come from Banquo's son. Macbeth embarks on a reign of terror, slaughtering many, including Macduff's family. Macduff had gone to seek Malcolm (one of Duncan's sons who fled) at the court of the English king. Malcolm is young and unsure of himself, but Macduff, pained with grief, persuades him to lead an army against Macbeth.

By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes

— MACBETH, ACT 4 SCENE 1

Act V

Macbeth feels safe in his remote castle at Dunsinane until he is told that Birnam Wood is moving towards him. Malcolm's army is carrying branches from the forest as camouflage for their assault on Macbeth's stronghold. Meanwhile, an overwrought and conscience-ridden Lady Macbeth walks in her sleep and tells her secrets to her doctor. She commits suicide. As the final battle commences, Macbeth hears of Lady Macbeth's suicide and mourns.

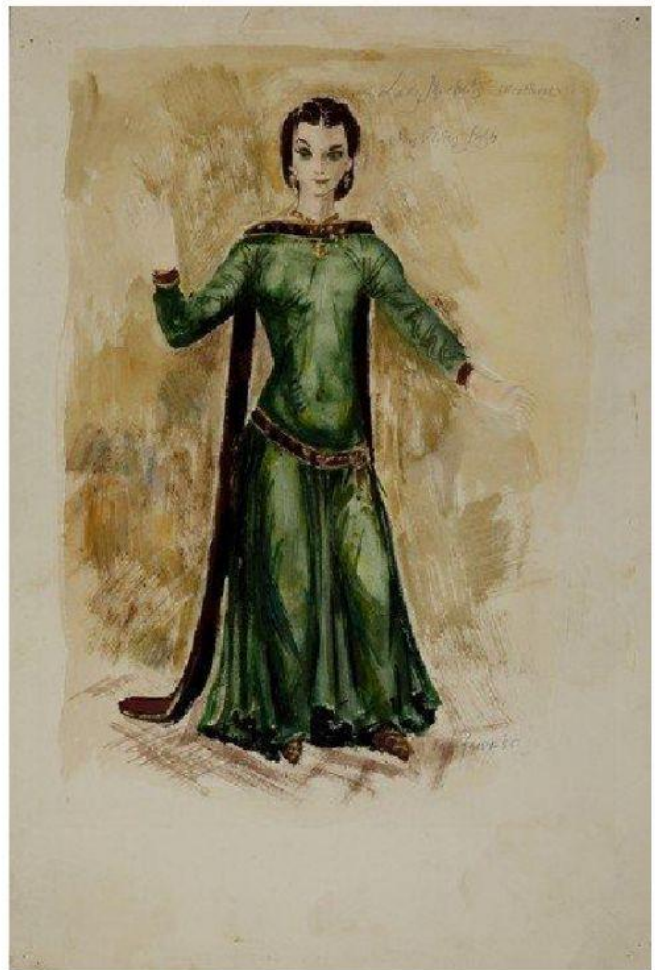
Out, damned spot!

— MACBETH, ACT 5 SCENE 1

In the midst of a losing battle, Macduff challenges Macbeth. Macbeth learns Macduff is the child of a caesarean birth (loop-hole!), realises he is doomed, and submits to his enemy. Macduff triumphs and brings the head of the traitor Macbeth to Malcolm. Malcolm declares peace and goes to Scone to be crowned king.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

— MACBETH, ACT 5 SCENE 5



Tick the correct option

- Macbeth and Banquo are walking in a ...
☐ forest ☐ moorland
- They are King Duncan's ...
☐ generals ☐ admirals
- They encounter three ...
☐ witches ☐ wizards
- They prophesy that Macbeth will be promoted to ...
☐ Earl of Cawdor ☐ King of Scotland
- ... will also be king (s).
☐ Banquo ☐ Banquo's descendants
- King Duncan names Macbeth Thane of Cawdor as a reward for his success in the recent ...
☐ battles ☐ travels
- King Duncan proposes to visit Macbeth at his castle in ... that night.
☐ Invergordon ☐ Inverness
- The Macbeths plot to kill Duncan as he ...
☐ arrives ☐ is asleep
- ... gives the guards drugged wine.
☐ Macbeth ☐ Lady Macbeth
- Macbeth ... Duncan to death.
☐ strangles ☐ stabs

11. ... kills the drunken guards.
☐ Macbeth ☐ Macduff
12. Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, ...
☐ are charged with treason ☐ are blamed for the murder
13. In an attempt to interrupt Banquo's bloodline, Macbeth kills ...
☐ Banquo ☐ Banquo's son
14. At a banquet in his castle, Macbeth sees the ghost of ...
☐ Duncan ☐ Banquo
15. The witches warn Macbeth that ... will march into battle against him.
☐ Birnam Wood ☐ Birman Wood
16. Macbeth slaughters ... family,
☐ Macduff's ☐ Malcolm's
17. Lady Macbeth ...
☐ has nightmares ☐ walks in her sleep
18. She ...
☐ is killed by Malcolm's army ☐ kills herself
19. Macbeth ... his enemy.
☐ fights ☐ gives in to
20. ... is crowned King of Scotland.
☐ Malcolm ☐ Macduff

Royal Shakespeare Company, 1967

